

Socialist Worker

For a socialist alternative to New Labour

80p

Firefighters to strike over pay and cuts

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Fullarton's workers speak out over 500 job losses

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Empire TV series—a rewrite of Britain's bloody history

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Only 13% back Blair on Iraq

Mass action can stop this war

March in London, 15 February



Drivers in Scotland refuse to move weapons train

"IT WAS a political protest over the threat to attack Iraq. It was a sign that as individuals and workers we were not prepared to be part of a murderous war, a conscientious objection to helping kill Iraqi civilians."

That was the message from a rail worker based in Motherwell, near Glasgow.

He was part of a group who refused to move a freight train carrying ammunition for the British military to use against Iraq.

Speaking exclusively to *Socialist Worker*, the worker added, "I believe that other workers will want to make similar protests. There has never been a more important moment to take a stand."

In all, 15 workers were involved. Some drivers refused to operate the train between the Glasgow area and the Glen Douglas base on Scotland's west coast. This is Europe's largest NATO weapons store.

Others said they would not come in on rest days or work overtime to move the ammunition. Another group refused to learn the route knowledge necessary to move trains on this track.

English Welsh and Scottish Railway (EWS), the freight company, applied heavy pressure on the workers and their Aslef union. If Aslef had given any official support to the action it could have faced legal action.

But the workers stood firm.

The humiliated Ministry of Defence eventually cancelled the train and was forced to transport the load by road.

Lindsey German, convenor of the Stop the War Coalition, says, "We fully support this action to impede an unjust and aggressive war. We hope that other people around the country will be able to do likewise."

□ A GROUP of rank and file dock workers in Genoa in Italy are discussing similar action to the train drivers' if ships leave the port to carry weapons to the Gulf.

■ Britain's biggest anti-war conference—see pages 4 & 5.

Innocent until proven guilty?

HYSTERIA GREETED the arrest of seven people after the toxin ricin was found in a north London flat.

Newspapers howled about "poison factories" run by asylum seekers bent on mass destruction.

Not one paper gave the slightest consideration to the thought that those arrested might be innocent, at least until proven guilty.

Yet six Algerians arrested last November and accused of being Al Qaida terrorists plotting mass murder on London's tube were finally charged just with passport violation offences.

The solicitor for one of these Algerians attacked the press coverage of that case, saying that the "tidal wave of prejudicial coverage was unprecedented".

The government's draconian anti-terrorist legislation also means people can be locked up simply for belonging to left wing organisations abroad.

So six people arrested on terrorism charges in London in December turned out to be supporters, five Turkish and one English, of a left wing Turkish group.

It was a similar atmosphere of hysteria and witch-hunting that in the 1970s led to innocent people like the Birmingham Six and the Guildford Four being locked up for years for terrorist crimes they had nothing to do with.

The price of a witch-hunt?

READERS MAY make a connection between the following facts:

(1) The Sangatte refugee centre near Calais was closed last month by the French government after huge pressure from the British government and a relentless campaign by British tabloid newspapers.

(2) There has been a surge in the number of Iraqi and Afghan refugees living homeless on the streets of the French capital, Paris, since the Sangatte closure. Four homeless people froze to death last week on the streets of Paris.

Power cuts on the horizon

THE MARKET in electricity generation created through privatisation could lead to power cuts as early as next year, according to a new report.

Nera, an economic consultancy, found that power companies are planning to close power stations to cut costs and reduce capacity.

But the chaos of the market means that too many power stations are likely to close as each company tries to push up electricity prices by reducing supply.

Privatisation of electricity supply in California led to severe power shortages and cuts there a couple of years ago after several years of overcapacity.

Rewarded for failure

THE AMEY construction company has so failed to maintain the railway in the Reading area that it lost the £50 million contract to Network Rail, the successor to Railtrack, this week.

The government, meanwhile, is pressing ahead with its PPP privatisation plan to hand over the maintenance of London's tube to private companies...including Amey.

Future of higher education

Government split on its top-up fees plan

THE GOVERNMENT is racked by divisions over university tuition fees.

Top universities and Downing Street advisers want colleges to be able to charge students thousands of pounds to study.

They want to hit students with a triple whammy—over £1,000 upfront to take up a college place, three years surviving with no grant, and then up to £3,000 in "top-up" fees when they have finished at college.

It could mean students paying over £20,000 for a degree.

Top-up fees would mean some universities charging a fortune. Rich people could study there, while poor students are forced to take up cheaper courses.

But the widespread opposition to top-up fees has thrown the government into chaos, causing rows and splits at the heart of New Labour.

Blair wants to push ahead with fees regardless. Chancellor Gordon Brown's camp is terrified of the political fallout if top-up fees are introduced.

Extra

Brown wants instead to bring in a graduate tax, so that every student pays an extra tax whatever college they went to.

The row is threatening to wreck the white paper due out in a couple of weeks.

Many students are already living in poverty, and many have been deterred from going to college at all, thanks to New Labour having already scrapped grants and imposed tuition fees.

Under either Blair's or Brown's plans things would get worse.

Some press reports suggest that the government may throw a sop to the opposition by bringing back some grants.

That is an argument for taxing people who get higher incomes, whether or not they have been to college.

But that is something the pro-rich New Labour government doesn't want to do. Instead it plans to penalise all students, whatever job they have.

Students who graduated last year had debts of at

Mickey Mouse minister

MINISTERS don't give a damn if their fees plan leads to courses closing.

They have a narrow, sterile vision of education.

Education minister Margaret Hodge insulted students and lecturers by saying the government's fees plan may signal the end of "Mickey Mouse" degrees.

The fight to stop top-up fees is a fight to defend the whole idea that education should be about learning and developing people's ideas, and not simply a production line for the needs of business.

Taxing

And students from households with lower incomes will only get grants of between £800 and £1,000 a year. That is nowhere near enough to live on.

A GIANT chemical company paid poverty-stricken students to drink "highly hazardous" pesticides.

The experiment was carried out on students from Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh.

The Bayer CropScience company now faces an inquiry. But the case shows how desperate students can be driven to take extreme measures to survive.

Students who graduated last year had debts of at

least £10,000—an increase of £6,700 compared to those who graduated in 1999.

Nearly half of all students say being able to pay off their debts after graduation is a major worry.

A NatWest bank survey says crippling monthly debt repayments of £200 a month are now the norm for graduates.

The survey also found the average starting salary for graduates was now just £13,422.

Hodge doffs cap to posh schools

THE GOVERNMENT has bowed down to private schools.

The education department had promised to increase the number of students from ordinary state schools going to university.

The 19 top universities took fewer than 20 percent of their students from poorer backgrounds last year.

Education minister Margaret Hodge said, "I have never witnessed such a class divide as I've seen in higher

education." Hodge's targets for getting state school pupils into university had the fee-paying private schools worried that their privileged position could be threatened.

So now she has simply dropped the targets, after meeting representatives from the top private schools to reassure them they had nothing to worry about.

The posh schools were reported to be "delighted" and "cock-a-hoop".

Rift with unions looms over two-tier workforce

A HUGE row looks set to erupt between New Labour and the trade unions over the two-tier workforce in the NHS, councils and schools.

The government's privatisation drive in the public sector, through PFI and PPP schemes and contracting out, has created huge anger among public sector workers.

As well as often decimating services, thousands of the lowest paid workers have been transferred to profiteering private firms.

There is limited protection for some of these workers. But new staff employed by these private firms find themselves on lower pay, fewer holidays and with no pensions and other benefits.

At the last Labour conference Tony Blair was forced to promise to "work with

the unions on the best way of ending the two-tier workforce".

A deal was supposed to be struck between the government and the unions on Thursday of this week.

But it seems that the government has bowed to pressure from bosses' organisations over the deal.

The GMB union says, "Yet again the CBI has been rattling the bars, and yet again Downing Street appears to be running scared."

The bosses want to sabotage anything which even gives privatised workers "broadly comparable" pay and conditions to those in the public sector.

Private companies know the only way they can make profits from public services is by making people work harder and longer for less pay.

THE HOUSING associations lining up to take over council housing want to turn themselves into profit-making, dividend-paying private companies.

The plan, revealed in the *Inside Housing* trade magazine, shatters claims that transferring council homes to housing associations is not privatisation.

The government has always denied that transfer is privatisation.

But now the country's biggest housing association, Places for People, wants to drop the veneer of being different to any other private company.

called by the Defend Council Housing campaign even more important.

The lobby is backed by tenants' federations, major trade unions and growing numbers of MPs and councillors. Everyone who can should try and join it.

Mask falls from council housing privatisation

'Stop privatisation—invest in council housing with no strings attached'

Lobby parliament, Wednesday 29 January
Rally 1-3pm, Central Hall, Westminster,
London

More information from Defend Council Housing
Phone 020 7987 9989 or go to



Only 1 in 8 back Blair's war policy

TONY BLAIR knows he is part of a small and shrinking minority when he backs George W Bush all the way over war with Iraq. And the crisis he faces is growing.

A poll this week showed that just 13 percent of people support Blair's position that it would be justified to support war without UN backing.

Another poll showed that nearly 60 percent do not believe that a convincing case has yet been made to fight in Iraq.

A solid one third is against an attack on Iraq on any basis, with or without a UN mandate.

The media were forced to give at least some publicity to the Stop the War Coalition conference last Saturday. The BBC has begun to talk of the "anti-war majority" in Britain.

The scale of opposition to war has found an echo in the Labour Party. A survey last weekend of Labour Party constituency chairs found that 69 percent believed there would be resignations if there was a war, and 5 percent said they would consider resigning themselves.

Many will privately agree with Jim Garton, the chair of Rother Valley Constituency Labour Party. He said, "We have no justification at all for a war on Iraq. The logic of the situation beggars belief."

"It is manufactured by George Bush and oil is a factor."

Divisions have emerged at the top of the party.

Guardian columnist Jackie Ashley

Movement growing in US



Picture: SCOTT GALINDEZ www.laindymedia.org

WELL OVER 20,000 people marched through Los Angeles last Saturday demanding no war on Iraq. Thousands also marched in Chicago and Minneapolis. More protests are planned in the US this week. See next week's *Socialist Worker* for an on the spot report from the US anti-war demonstrations

wrote last week, "The cabinet is not split only because it is united in deep angst and worry about what Blair is up to over Iraq."

Blair has not even been able to persuade substantial sections of the ruling class that war is right. As

one top soldier told the *Sunday Telegraph*, "The country does not have the stomach for a war in Iraq, and frankly neither do many senior officers."

Such people won't stop the war, but the splits make Blair far weaker.

"My job is sometimes to say things that people don't want to hear," says Blair.

Our job is to create a big enough movement that can force him to do the thing he does not want to do—break from Bush.

The backing of the British government is central to Bush being able to pretend that the war is not just a US product.

If we can lever Blair away from backing war then it will be a crushing blow to stop the slaughter.

DON'T ATTACK IRAQ

Demonstrate

**Saturday
15 February**

**Assemble 12 noon
Embankment, London**

plus range of events planned for evening of Friday 14 February, London



Stop the War Coalition 020 7053 2155/6

**Mass lobby of parliament Tuesday 21 January,
2.30pm, protest 5pm Parliament Square and
rally 7pm House of Commons**

UN argument is a trap for anti-war movement—don't fall for it

FACED WITH the opposition to war, Blair is going for a weak point in some people's arguments—the United Nations.

Cabinet minister Clare Short has raised doubts about a war, but added that Blair should "keep on the UN route and stop the US going to war too early".

War will be wrong whether or not the US manages to bend the United Nations to its will, or whether it comes sooner or later.

Just as with the Security Council resolution last year, Bush's gang will use every dirty trick to bully and bribe others to back their views.

Chief weapons inspector Hans Blix will get the message that the US expects him to come up with something, anything, that will act as a trigger for war.

Blix has suggested that the fact he has found nothing may prove that the Iraqi government is lying about what it has.

If it comes to a vote, Russia and France have already been offered deals over Iraqi oil.

Both have ships ready to go to the Gulf.

Weaker countries on the Security Council—such as Angola, Bulgaria, Cameroon and Guinea—will be told trade and aid deals depend on how they behave.

We should unmask the manoeuvres and try to stop Blair conning people into backing bloodshed through the UN.

These sham peace talks

THE BITTER suffering of the Palestinian people continues daily. Blair's reaction is to call a fake conference.

Palestinian representatives have been barred by the Israelis from travelling to the conference.

The conference will discuss a hypothetical constitution for a Palestinian state that does not exist.

Also at the conference, to advise on

democratic procedures, will be Saudi Arabia (an absolute monarchy where the constitution is meaningless), Jordan (an absolute monarchy where the powers of the "advisory assembly" are meaningless), and Egypt (a virtual dictatorship where civil rights are meaningless).

Meanwhile the US continues to arm and back the Israeli government that murders and represses Palestinian civilians.



THE 28 September demonstration in London inspired people across the world

Cairo motion is great opportunity

AN IMPORTANT conference held in Cairo, Egypt, last December attracted 400 delegates and launched the International Campaign Against US Aggression on Iraq.

The conference issued a declaration against war and globalisation.

The key points of the declaration include:

"We reaffirm our resolve to stand in solidarity with the people of Iraq and Palestine, recognising that war and aggression against them is but part of a US project of global domination and subjugation.

"That solidarity is integral to the internationalist struggle against neo-liberal globalisation.

"The Cairo meeting is an extension of a protracted international struggle against imperialism, from Seattle and Genoa, to Lisbon and Florence, to Cordoba and Cairo.

"Capitalist globalisation and US hegemony prioritise the interests of monopolistic capitalist circles above those of the people, including Europeans and US citizens.

"They also integrate the economies of different countries into a single global capitalist economic system, under conditions which undermine social development.

"In addition poverty and unemployment increase."

"We declare our total opposition to war on Iraq and our resolve to continue the struggle against US policies of global domination.

"The Cairo conference against war on Iraq and in solidarity with Palestine represents the launching of an international popular movement that creates effective mechanisms for confronting policies of aggression."

John Rees, vice-chair of the International Campaign Against US Aggression on

Iraq, explained the significance of the Cairo declaration at Saturday's London conference, which voted unanimously to support the declaration.

"We have an opportunity that presents itself once in a generation—an enormous international movement against war.

"The Cairo declaration is of great importance because it is a call from the most powerful centre of the region of the globe that will be most powerfully affected by an attack on Iraq."

"The greatest assistance to people in the Middle East is for the movement in the West to deliver the greatest possible solidarity to them.

"One way to do this is to sign the declaration.

"This can be done by leaders of the movement, the strongest organisations of the labour movement and from individuals in the movement."

The signatories so far include: Jeremy Corbyn MP, George Galloway MP, Tony Benn (former MP and cabinet minister), Susan George (writer and ATTAC activist), Bob Crow (general secretary, rail workers' RMT union), Mick Rix (general secretary, train drivers' Aslef union), Julie Christie (actor), George Monbiot (journalist), Harold Pinter (playwright), Dr Siddiqui (leader, Muslim Parliament of Great Britain), Tommy Sheridan (Scottish Socialist Party MSP), Dr Ghada Karmi (research fellow, Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter), Tariq Ali (writer and broadcaster).

● **For the full text of the declaration and a list of signatories so far go to www.stopwar.org.uk**

● **For more information or to add your name phone 020 7053 2155 or e-mail office@stopwar.org.uk**



BANNER DROP: "We got no flak"

'No war' call as Ark Royal sails

THE ARK Royal aircraft carrier did not set sail unopposed. We dropped a large banner saying "No to war" down walls at the entrance to the harbour.

Hundreds of relatives were saying goodbye, but we got no flak. I remember during the Falklands War

being called a "traitor" for opposing war, but not this time.

There has been a sea change. Our anti-war movement can reach parts we have never reached before.'

**JOHN MOLYNEUX,
Portsmouth Stop the
War Coalition**

A LANDMARK CONFERENCE

'Now the anti-war majority is on the march. Build the 15 Feb protest'



'THERE WERE four of us from Rossendale who travelled to the 28 September anti-war demonstration. We went on the coach from Burnley.

When we came back we launched our own Stop the War group. We had about 23 people at the launch meeting.

A Labour borough councillor came to our meeting and said he planned to resign if war started. He is trying to get other councillors to do the same.

We've had stalls, petitions. On 31 October we had a protest rally in the town and over 50 people came. Now we are taking a coach to London for the 15 February march.

Everyone can do the same.'

JEAN JOHNSON, Rossendale Stop the War

THE STOP the War Coalition conference in London last Saturday was a huge success. It was a historic gathering, reflecting the mushrooming anti-war movement right across Britain.

"The anti-war majority is on the march and determined to win," said Labour MP George Galloway giving one of the day's keynote speeches.

The conference was twice as big as anyone had expected, with over 800 delegates from local groups and affiliated unions and organisations.

Young and old, socialists, trade unionists, peace campaigners, representatives of Muslim organisations and many, many more all united around the single message "No war".

Motions, elections for a steering committee and much else all had their place.

But the central thrust of the conference was a determination to build the 15 February national demonstration, and to prepare for mass, militant protest if war breaks out.

Speakers spelled out how the movement had already rocked the warmongers.

"When defence secretary Geoff Hoon announced the military deployment to MPs and was met by a stony silence interrupted only by vociferous opposition to war, you knew something had changed," argued George Galloway.

"When political journalist Andrew Marr says he can't find a single cabinet minister who would privately support the war, you know we are at a turning point.

"There are 100 MPs against the war because there are millions of ordinary people on the move, because we have built a united anti-war movement.

"MPs know the ground has shifted under their feet.

"15 February is a red letter day for us—it will be one of the most important days of our lives so far.

"The whole world will be watching us and millions of others who will be demonstrating around the world.

"Britain is a key battleground. If we can cut the umbilical cord that links Blair to George Bush, if we pull Britain out of the war, it will have a tremendous impact on the anti-war movement in the US."

'PEOPLE HAVE to be prepared to take action if murder is committed in Iraq.'

The support from trade unions for the anti-war movement is unprecedented.

We have to force the other trade union leaders to get off the fence.'

PAUL MACKNEY, general secretary of the Naftha lecturers' union



'THE US is the greatest terrorist of the 21st century.'

I served my country in the last Gulf War. I was exposed to depleted uranium. If they do that to their own side, think what they do to the rest of the world.'

Soon hundreds of people will be leaving for Baghdad to make it harder for Bush to launch World War Three and destroy our world.'

KEN NICOLLS O'KEEFE, US Gulf War veteran

SOCIALIST WORKER
special report

Asad Rehman of the Stop the War Coalition put the movement in Britain in its global context,

"The Stop the War Coalition demonstration last September had a huge impact.

"We helped to make sure million people marched against war at the European Social Forum in Florence last November.

"We helped to make sure that the meeting of the social movements at Florence adopted a resolution for a united day of anti-war action across Europe.

"If Bush and Blair can coordinate their action, we have to coordinate ours.

"On 15 February we will all be marching behind banners that say 'No to war on Iraq'.

"This is now a truly global movement.

Events

"Activists will be discussing building opposition to the war at the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

"On 15 February we will be marching in Cairo, Australia, Manila, New York, Glasgow, Berlin, Skopje, Athens, Paris, Copenhagen, Rome, Stockholm, Oslo, Amsterdam and hundreds of other places around the world.

"On that day all the leaders of the world will quiver in fear at the sight of our movement—black and white, Jews and Arabs, trade unionists and students, all marching together."

Stop the War Coalition national convenor Lindsey German argued, "The anti-war feeling is stronger than it has ever been before a war has actually taken place, and the movement is still developing."

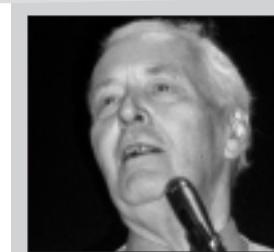
"Events in the last week show we do have the power to stop the war.

"Our demos, our protests, our activities have built the movement and forced Tony Blair to say maybe we should delay the war until the autumn.

"Now is the time to put even more pressure and break Blair from Bush. If Blair comes to think war will split the Labour Party, he will have to think again about supporting Bush."

"Our movement is inspiring people around the world. The demo on 28 September showed that demonstration

MEETS AS OPPOSITION IS SHAKING BLAIR



TONY BENN

'WE ARE seeking to unite the people of the world for peace, democracy and internationalism.'

We are speaking for the whole of humanity.

This is not an argument between black and white or between Arabs and Jews—it is between the people of the world and the rulers of the world.

The US has all the smart weapons, but think what we could do with all the technology and all the money they spend on war to help the poor and the starving.

We are trying to reclaim the earth for the people who produce the wealth.

The prime minister is a very worried man. He cannot take us to war and maintain his own position. Remember Suez.

We are not a protest movement—we are a political movement because we believe another world is possible.

The British prime minister has the power to stop Bush.'

TONY BENN



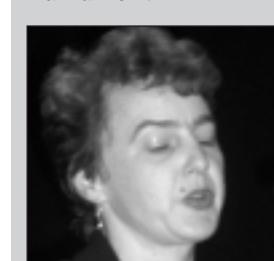
DR SIDDIQUI

'THE 28 September demonstration marked a shift in the Muslim community.'

We are against US hegemony, privatisation and globalisation.

Young people are changing. If you go to the mosques you will find them.'

DR SIDDIQUI, leader of the UK Muslim Parliament



KATE HUDSON

'IT IS our historical responsibility to turn back the tide of this war.'

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament is proud to work alongside the Stop the War Coalition and the Muslim Association to mobilise against this war.'

KATE HUDSON, vice-chair CND

'There is new hope now'



AHMED BEN BELLA was a leader of the Algerian liberation struggle and the first president of independent Algeria in the 1960s. Now he is a key figure in the global anti-war movement, and addressed Saturday's conference:

I AM 86 years old. I spent 24 years in a French prison. But I liberated my country. I was appointed president of the international movement launched at the Cairo conference in December. Organisations from the South and the North met together to organise common actions to fight against the global system of capital.

The world system must be changed. It has had its time.

There are 400 multinational corporations who control the majority of the world's wealth.

Bush's policies reflect the interests of these corporations. He is attacking Iraq because of these interests—they include oil.

General Motors has four times as much wealth as a country like Egypt with 70 million inhabitants. The 84 richest people in the world have an income greater than that of China.

There is terror in the world. It is that of Mr Bush. There are 35 million people who die of hunger every year.

That is terrorism.

The South—Africa—is totally devastated. We in the South are not responsible

for this. The global system is responsible.

Poverty is endemic in the South and it is spreading to the North. Here, and in France, there is too much poverty.

In the North the movement which is fighting back gives you hope. This movement is very important. I was in Florence—there is hope today, especially among the young.

We live in a dangerous situation. Bush has decided to attack. There are one or two ways in which the war machine can be stopped.

The first is if the American people demonstrate in the streets as they did over Vietnam. They can stop Bush.

There is another way. It lies with people here in Britain. If one or two million say no to war, they can stop Blair.

I have known war. War is a terrible thing.

We must stop Bush and Blair, and it is you who can stop them.'

How can we make the most impact?

DURING THE conference there was a lot of discussion about the most effective way to oppose the war and how to increase the pressure on Blair.

Some argued that the focus should be on groups of people taking more militant action.

But the overwhelming number of delegates felt that mass demonstrations were crucial to involving the widest number of people and giving large numbers of people the confidence to take more action.

Turnout

Chris Bamberg, a delegate from Kensington and Chelsea Stop the War Coalition, argued that there had to be a massive turnout on 15 February.

He argued, "If the demo on 15 February is not bigger than the last one, imagine how Blair will smirk and how Condoleezza Rice, who

had to comment on the last demo, will crow."

"Imagine how the people in Egypt facing repression to oppose war, and how the train drivers in Scotland who refused to move military supplies, will feel."

"15 February will be the launch pad for a mass campaign of civil disobedience involving workers walking out, pensioners blockading roads and students occupying colleges."

"There is no contradiction between demonstrating and direct action."

"During the Vietnam War the movement went from the streets to the workplaces and the ghettos and back to the streets."

Most delegates backed this approach.

They supported a strategy of organising mass civil disobedience if war breaks out, rather than relying on a few people taking direct action on behalf of the mass movement.

Join the Stop the War Coalition

E-mail office@stopwar.org.uk

Phone 020 7053 2155

For more info and campaign materials go to www.stopwar.org.uk



'GLOBALLY IT is only the leaders who want this war. The people of the world do not want it.'

We have to be a thorn in the side of this imperialist government.

We in the FBU are also preparing to stand up and fight for what we believe in, to stop the government decimating the fire service.'

CARL ST PAUL, Fire Brigades Union official



'UP UNTIL 1999 I was an officer in the British army. I represent the change in what is happening.'

A friend still in the army told me he was trying to persuade himself that the war was not an entirely squalid affair.

Our argument is penetrating hitherto imperialist bastions of the establishment.'

JAMES THORNE, Manchester University

comment

Inspiration in Hyderabad

THE ASIAN Social Forum (ASF) held in Hyderabad in India ended last week with a closing rally of over 10,000 people.

It was followed by a demonstration that drew in thousands more.

Trucks and coaches from across the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh arrived with people who had made the trip to demonstrate their opposition to imperialism and war.

A large contingent from the All-India Student Federation chanted "We want revolution!" and "Long live socialism! Capitalism—down, down!"

Their chants echoed among women's groups, environmental campaigners and trade unionists.

Many had improvised their own placards and banners which carried anti-war messages.

An enormous puppet snake, which was there to represent the threat of anti-Muslim communal violence, threaded its way through the demonstration.

Along the route there was street theatre and sideshows.

A large raised platform was turned into a gallows on which an indebted poor peasant farmer was lynched by a World Bank executioner.

A loudspeaker broadcast the message, "Now we understand the link between war, globalisation and communal violence."

The demonstration followed a week of intensive discussion and debate held in hundreds of venues across the city.

Vast meetings held in enormous tents attracted audiences of over 1,000, while smaller workshops covered every conceivable subject.

The ASF represents something new in Indian politics—a growing feeling of common interest between campaigners on many different issues.

It has created a space for those who want to change society.

Invited

Anti-nuclear activists invited tribal peoples to address their meetings and tell them how uranium mining is destroying their health and environment. Those who are fighting India's caste system came to meetings about water privatisation.

Like any newly-born movement, different forces are shaping it.

Within the ASF there are those who see the movement as a challenge to the dominant capitalist powers worldwide but who mute their criticism of their rulers at home.

There are others who see the ASF as an umbrella group for non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

India is a country whose economic growth has increased the disparities between rich and poor to an incredible level.

While millions are living without a proper roof over their heads, India's new rich are constantly looking for new ways to spend money.

The latest fads include taking cruises to Singapore for extended shopping trips, or buying enormous four wheel drive cars which help clog up the congested roads of India's cities.

A minority of delegates wanted the ASF to be part of

**YURI PRASAD
reports back
from the Asian
Social Forum in
India**

an anti-capitalist movement that challenges the system both at home and abroad.

They see the rich in India working hand in hand with the rich in the West to privatise state-owned enterprises and cut social spending.

The Indian company Infosystems is the second largest software manufacturer in the world.

During the week of the ASF the chief executive of Infosystems demanded a total end to state subsidies of higher education in order to cut corporation taxes.

As Indian corporate greed matches its Western counterpart more people in India want to know about the anti-capitalist movement and how it has developed from its origin in the Seattle protests in 1999.

Mobile

Many had heard about the anti-war movement in Britain. They wanted to know how we had managed to organise demonstrations of hundreds of thousands.

One delegate explained that a member of his family had been in London for the demonstration last September.

He was so astounded by its size and diversity that he had used his mobile phone to give an on the spot report to his family in India.

Many delegates wanted to discuss whether radical change is possible in India, and if it is what forces could bring it about.

In a seminar on the future of socialism the Egyptian activist and academic Samir Amin argued that any transition from capitalism would "take two or three centuries".

Others felt that the collapse of the "Soviet experiment" had been a setback. But everyone was excited about the size and diversity of the ASF.

Many left wing political organisations in India talk about the need to organise among the working class, but then see elections as the best way of implementing their ideas.

Others look to the peasantry to form armed bands which can take land from the big landlords and distribute it to the poor.

But there are people who are looking for something else.

They talked for hours about whether revolution was possible, what social classes would make a revolution, and how any future society would have democracy at its core.

At the moment their numbers are small, but the audience for their ideas is growing by the day.

inside the system

Now Sir Killalot

THIS YEAR'S New Year Honours List was hailed as a celebration of the efforts of ordinary people.

But gongs were awarded for "services to the defence industries".

Honours went to:

- Sir John Rose, £948,000 a year chief executive of Rolls-Royce.

- Roger James, OBE, regional head of combat helicopter manufacturer Westland.

- David Morgan, OBE, expert in "novel weapons" for MBDA Missiles, the world's biggest missile maker.

- Mike Salmon, OBE, director at BAE Systems Marine.

A professor famous for attacking fears about global warming has been exposed as a fraud.

Bjorn Lomborg became a champion for the right wing with his book, *The Skeptical Environmentalist*.

A year-long investigation by a Danish committee on scientific honesty has found him guilty of fabricating data, ignoring unwanted results, using misleading methods and misrepresenting others' results.

PC blues

ARE YOU feeling sad and blue?

It may be more than just the post-holiday hangover.

Sitting in front of a computer for more than five hours a day can make you feel depressed, new research has revealed.

It's not just headaches, eye strain and backache. They can also damage mental health.

Some 25,000 workers took part in the survey. Many complained of feeling depressed and anxious, reluctant to get up in the morning, having broken sleep and problems getting along with other workers.

WE are always being told that women can make it to the top if they are ambitious enough.

But that's not how the bosses see it.

Employers like their women humble and self critical, and their men macho and confident.

A study by researchers at Goldsmiths' College in London showed that employers holding interviews had "deeply ingrained" sexist stereotypes.

"We found over and over again that women were rated higher the more they conformed with modest, compliant, deferential behaviour," a researcher said.

Gun law for royal family

THINGS THEY SAY

"YOU KNOW I had a drinking problem. Right now I should be in a bar in Texas, not the Oval Office. There is only one reason that I am in the Oval Office and not in a bar. I found God. I am here because of the power of prayer."

■ GEORGE W BUSH asking a meeting of religious leaders at the Oval Office to pray for him

"HE'S THE second most."

■ Defence secretary GEOFF HOON when asked if the Italian government had the most pro-US defence minister in Europe

"THE PROBLEM we have faced time and time again is the slavish devotion to targets, many of which have not been set very intelligently. It's a sure-fire way of not getting improvements in public services."

■ JAMES STRACHAN, chair of the Audit Commission

"THEIR AIM was to make war with Iraq look absurd, and their success was total. The programme took to pieces the case for war."

■ Daily Telegraph TV reviewer STEPHEN PILE on Bremner, Bird and Fortune's programme on the war

"I HAVE never seen a more divided group in my 30 years of involvement in foreign policy."

■ WHITE HOUSE INSIDER on US government splits over North Korea

"I remain unconvinced that an attack on Iraq is necessary. Over the past 30 years America has a long record of attacking small countries. All these operations leave pockets of hatred for America around the world. This hatred breeds terrorism."

■ FIELD MARSHAL SIR JOHN STANIER

DO YOU have a story for Inside the System? Send it to Inside the System, Socialist Worker, PO Box 82, London E3 3LH. All readers who send in a story that is printed are put into a monthly raffle for a book.

Reich demoted

GEORGE BUSH'S Republicans are so worried about hostility against them in Latin America that they have had to demote an old favourite.

Otto Reich has helped to make the US a safe haven for right wing Cuban terrorists.

He was found guilty of "prohibited covert propaganda" on behalf of the Contras, who were trying to overthrow the Sandinista government in Nicaragua in the 1980s.

George Bush appointed Reich to the State Department to a post with "special

responsibilities" for US policy in Latin America.

Now Bush doesn't put Reich's name forward for a second year in the post for fear of an embarrassing rejection.

Commentators are saying it's because Otto Reich backed the failed coup in Venezuela last year against the country's democratically elected president, Hugo Chavez.

Reich's "consolation prize" is to try to get other Latin American countries to come up with some compromise solution to the crisis in Venezuela.

BIG companies are furious that the BBC is planning to put much of the National Curriculum on the internet for free.

The ITV company Granada, Channel 4 and Pearson, which owns Penguin Books, expressed their "profound disappointment" at the plans to allow children free access to the information.

They claim they will be deprived of £400 million in revenues. They have even set up a lobby group to argue their case for profit before free education.

Cop out

PC GARY Bretherick fell a bit short of the police force's "high standards" recently. The 37 year old, 14-stone copper sent an 18 year old to take a fitness test on his behalf so he could continue being a linesman at local football matches.

The test was organised by the Football Association, and an FA official who knew PC Bretherick spotted that something funny was going on.

Lancashire police have fired the officer.

HIGH STREET giant W H Smith brags that its employees are "driven to achieve and excel in everything they do".

"Our people believe in themselves, and are committed to working together to build the future of W H Smith."

"They are the sort of people who love to generate a 'you can't possibly do it like that' reaction. And then do it like that."

That is also the reaction many people had on hearing about W H Smith bosses

treatment of a worker with learning difficulties.

Karen Godfrey worked part time in their Monmouth store in South Wales for six years.

She was paid in gift vouchers worth £5 for four hours work a week.

Just before Christmas Karen was given the boot.

This bosses claimed was because she wasn't covered by the staff insurance scheme.

After an outcry Karen was offered a permanent job with full benefits.

FIREFIGHTERS SET TO STRIKE ON TUESDAY

'We are out to win our fight'

by KEVIN OVENDEN

RENEWED determination swept through fire stations and control rooms as members of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) heard that their union has called a snap strike on Tuesday.

Some 100 FBU brig-

ade secretaries and other officials met at the TUC headquarters on Friday of last week.

They heard the govern-

ment was insisting on the

worst deal yet in the eight

month long pay dispute.

"The government has

taken a hard position," said

Micky Nicholas, who repre-

sents black and ethnic mi-

nority FBU members on the

union's executive.

"They are 'offering' us 4

percent this year, but only if

we sign up to the package of

cuts in the Bain report.

"That's worse than the 4

percent without strings they

offered before Christmas.

"There's talk of a further

7 percent from November.

"That will not be for

everybody.

"It will only be for those

deemed to have achieved

extra skills, and is again

conditional on us accepting

4,500 job losses and a host

of other attacks.

"It's really bitter news

Strategy

He and the executive are to meet next week to come up with a strategy for further strikes—most likely of 24 and 48 hours—to put to another meeting of local officials on Friday.

Two 48-hour strikes, beginning on 28 January and 1 February, were already announced before the new year.

Andy Gilchrist said, "The government has to look at the problems it will have with long weeks or

months of strikes."

FBU leaders also told the reps' meeting there would be no more suspension of strikes without a "substantial offer" on the table.

Tony Blair faces immense problems. The latest strikes come just as Blair tries to back George Bush's deeply unpopular war on Iraq.

The British military is under strain.

Already 1,000 of the 19,000 troops used to cover the firefighters' strikes last November have been dispatched for the Gulf.

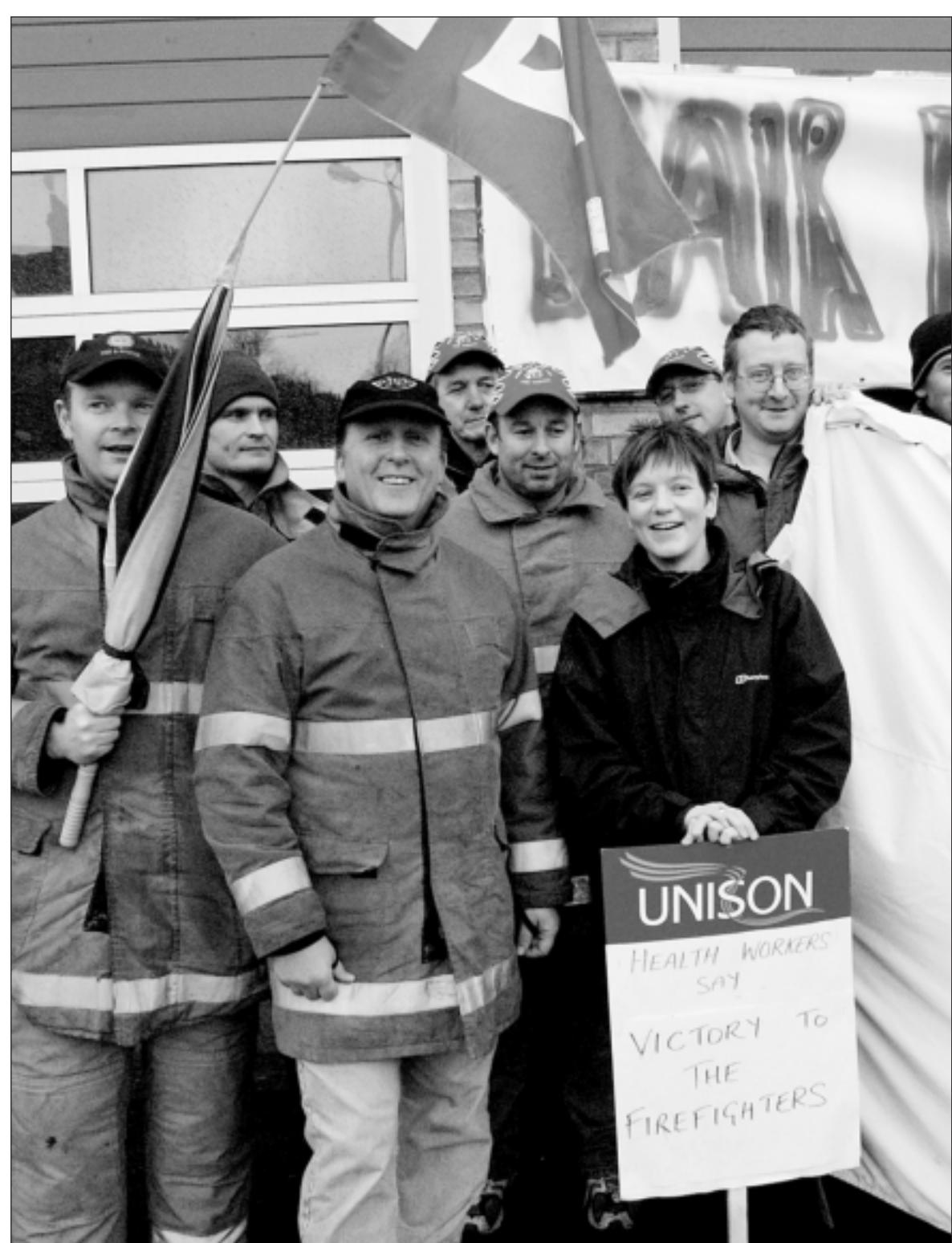
Any attempt by the government to accuse the firefighters of "undermining the war effort" is fraught with danger. The firefighters have popular support—the war does not.

That will not stop New Labour trying. Blair has set a course for war at home and abroad.

FBU officials and executive members say privately that stringing out the dispute—through shorter strikes over a longer period—is designed to make the most of the political problems that can erupt in the government's face.

"Who would have expected the furore over Cherie Blair?" asked one.

Another said, "There are all sorts of rumblings over



THE FIREFIGHTERS have popular support, including from other public sector workers and trade unionists

a range of issues.

"Events such as the Edinburgh fire last year suddenly showed how right we are to reject cuts to night-time fire cover."

"But we have to be prepared to shift gear when things happen that create more serious problems for the government."

"We can't just rely on that."

"We have to begin explaining now how we can move to stepping up action and to winning wider trade union support. It's life or death for us now."

Claim

"The stakes are pretty high for the government too."

"I didn't expect anything to come through talks and suspending strikes," says Ian Leahair, FBU area rep for east London. "Now everyone can see that nothing has come of it."

"The government and employers have upped the ante and there is no turning back."

"We ain't having 4,500 job losses. We are going out for all four points of our pay claim and to defend the fire service."

"We've got to get that momentum back up. Crucially, we've got to reactivate and build on the solidarity we got when we were out."

Solidarity is needed

THE firefighters can win.

There was a wave of support for the 48-hour and eight-day strikes at the end of last year.

The firefighters are standing up to a government that is hellbent on slashing the service and inflicting a defeat on a key section of public sector workers.

London's tube workers took a brave stand during the first 48-hour fire strike in refusing to take out trains without adequate fire cover.

Wider solidarity is needed now. It cannot be left to individual trade union activists.

Leaders of the health service section of the Unison union said before Christmas that they could not consult on the government's Agenda for Change pay package

while ministers were at war with the FBU.

They should be backing the FBU by fighting over pay. No union leader should be avoiding confrontation with the government.

If the government presses ahead with rumoured threats to ban the fire strike, the TUC and other union leaders should respond with national strike action.

The FBU's policy is for immediate action to defend the right to strike.

Collections in workplaces, solidarity meetings and raising health and safety concerns all helped to create a climate of support for the firefighters when they last struck.

Doing all that is vital to laying the basis for the solidarity they need to win.

New Labour wants cuts across the fire service

THE GOVERNMENT is trying to push through new laws to implement the cuts package it wants firefighters to accept.

John Prescott has drawn up plans to scrap Section 19 of the Fire Service Act, which requires central government to review and approve any move to shut stations.

The Scottish Parliament last week rejected that move.

But Prescott has said he is looking to use the Westminster parliament to force through wholesale attacks on the fire service.

The most aggressive local employers are not prepared to sit back during a long dispute.

The Nottinghamshire authority and its chief officer have drawn up new, worse contracts for firefighters and control staff.

Nottinghamshire, and other authorities, could give 90 days notice and then impose the contracts, breaking up national conditions.

"People have just had enough of what New Labour is doing nationally and locally," Alan Maclean from Nottinghamshire FBU told *Socialist Worker*.

"The Labour Party cannot take the support of trade unionists for granted.

"Fifty five thousand FBU members voted to get Labour in. We can vote to get them out as well."

socialism from below**Does a mortgage make you part of the system?**

HOME-OWNERS are all middle class. If you've bought your house or got a mortgage you're a property owner, got a stake in the system, been bought off.

Any activist must have come across such comments.

It was an argument popularised in Britain during the years of Margaret Thatcher's Tory governments in the 1980s. She pushed the notion of a "property-owning democracy".

The idea was that by giving people a stake in the system, some property, they would come to share the capitalist ethos and become natural Tory voters.

It is an idea that has been taken over by New Labour.

After the Second World War 60 percent of people in Britain rented their homes.

Today 68 percent own their homes or pay a mortgage. But the reality of "home ownership" was always far removed from the Thatcherite propaganda.

As house prices slumped in the late 1980s and interest rates soared many found the dream of home ownership turned into the nightmare of repossession.

A new report published last week underlined what the reality of home ownership is for many people today.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation report says, "The prevailing view of home ownership continues to be one that associates the tenure with affluent households."

In fact, says the report, "half of all people living in poverty today are home-owners".

The report used a standard and very basic definition of poverty—whether people could afford key necessities such as a warm coat or a fridge.

On that measure they found that 25 percent, one in four, of Britain's population is poor today. That is itself a shocking figure.

Perhaps more surprisingly it found that half of those living in such poverty either owned their homes outright or were paying mortgages.

Almost one in five of those living in poverty owned

PAUL McGARR asks if home owners are all middle class

coined the term "bourgeoisification" to describe this supposed process by which workers were becoming part of the middle class, or bourgeoisie.

The argument was wrong then and is still wrong when it comes to mortgages today.

Class is not about whether you buy a few commodities, a car, TV or whatever. Nor is it about to who you pay money in order to have a roof over your head.

And a third of those living in poverty are mortgage payers, many people with jobs battling to keep up payments while going without basic necessities.

All this is with interest rates at a historically low level and with unemployment at still relatively low levels by recent standards.

Any recession, rise in unemployment, or rise in interest rates will plunge millions more mortgage payers into poverty.

The reality is that far from having a "stake" in the system, most mortgage payers are at the mercy of the banks and building societies, and many are also living in miserable poverty.

Those "home-owners" who lose their job can quickly find they cannot keep up mortgage payments and be repossessed by the bank or building society.

The vast bulk of people in society depend entirely on working in order to survive. They are therefore part of the working class.

There is not a shred of evidence to support the notion that workers with mortgages are less likely to be trade union members, for instance. In fact most union members today are mortgage payers.

Simply becoming a mortgage payer doesn't make you more likely to vote Tory, or not go on strike.

In the 1984-5 miners' strike, for example, many miners were mortgage payers. That did not stop them standing firm on the picket line for a year.

Today the majority of firefighters own their own homes or are mortgage payers.

The same applies to many other groups of workers, from the school teachers to the college lecturers who have struck in the last year.

Work is what shapes class, and it is class that shapes whether people can and do fight.

Instead the union official blandly explained management thinking.

There was a flurry of questions: "Why should we believe them?" "How can there be so much money around in the industry and yet we're sent down the road?" "Is this some sort of punishment for going on strike last year?"

(Gourock workers struck for their first rise for four years and eventually settled for a 2 percent rise.)

The union official nods sympathetically but says all of these questions are irrelevant because the plant is closing and that's that.

"You read about the docks in the past, with people scrabbling for a job for a day. I sometimes wonder how far we've come."

The redundancy money won't keep anyone going for long—it is one week's pay for each year worked.

There's laughter when someone announces that redundancy money is free of tax up to £30,000. A worker calculates that you'd have to have worked 120 years to get that much.

"We should march on IBM, show them we're angry, do something to make them think twice about doing the same again," some people had muttered as the meeting began.

Chrissie is 19 years old. Her mother was sacked from another local firm, National Semiconductor, four years ago and has not worked since.

Chrissie is looking at £300 redundancy. "That's enough to cover me for a fortnight. If I don't get another job I'm in real trouble," she says.

DELIA GRANT

Socialist Review**GUNNING FOR IRAQ**

Opposition to war grows across the world

● **Mike Davis** on Gangs of New York

● **Rob Hoveman** on Labour and the political fund

● **Chris Harman** on the crisis in Venezuela

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BOSSES' VICIOUS NEW YEAR MESSAGE

by CHARLIE KIMBER

Hammer blow for 500 in Scotland**Is this the future for thousands more?**

Picture: DUNCAN BROWN

FULLARTON'S WORKERS are angry, bitter and anxious

'Management haven't behaved as if we're human beings.'

Delia Grant

"We got £5.48 an hour at Fullarton, less than £250 a week before tax. It was always hard work."

"They have done this closure in the most sleekit [devious] way," says Thomas Callender, who has worked at the Fullarton plant for eight years.

"We did everything they asked for and then they close us in a moment."

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Chrissie is looking at £300 redundancy. "That's enough to cover me for a fortnight. If I don't get another job I'm in real trouble," she says.

"I've been more flexible than a rubber man. It hasn't got me very far."

Ben

may mean well but it's just a bit of sugar on a very nasty pill."

Some workers are angry with the union. "The officials have got their eyes on the Scottish Parliament elections in May," says an ISTC member afterwards. "They're worried that if they call a demonstration, let alone a strike, then it will embarrass Labour."

"I think it would be great to embarrass the government in Edinburgh

and London.

"We can fight back. In 1998 we had a campaign and walkouts to win union recognition. We won. Now the union officials don't organise any resistance."

The Fullarton closure has shown again how little companies care for their workers.

It has also shown why we need fighting unions—unions that are prepared to resist job losses and closures, not simply carry management's message to the workforce.

There is a long tradition of resistance across the west of Scotland which needs to be reclaimed—such as the victorious occupation of the UCS shipyards in 1972 to stop them closing.

People employed in Britain work the longest hours in Europe, while millions are unemployed and millions more fear they will join them.

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Rising profits and misery

SAM RUSSELL'S Simclar International bought Fullarton last August.

As well as Gourock it has other plants in Prestwick, Irvine and Dundee.

These will continue to operate, but many of the workers there are on even worse terms and conditions than the Gourock staff were.

Fullarton's crucial customer was Sanmina, which in turn was a contractor to IBM.

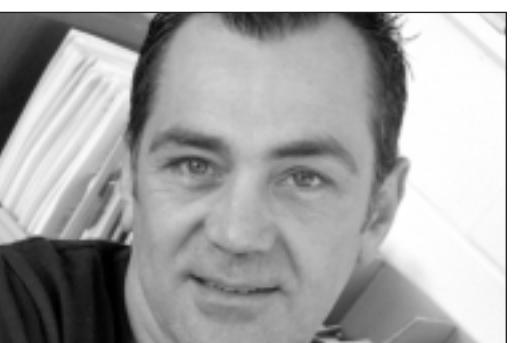
Fullarton bosses say that Sanmina has cut its orders and therefore a plant had to close.

In the same week as the Fullarton plant closed, Sanmina took over IBM's manufacturing operations in the area.

IBM made a worldwide profit of nearly \$8.5 billion last year. Sanmina grabbed \$167 million.

EX PRISON GOVERNOR SAYS...**Look at reasons for the gun crime rise**

PROFESSOR DAVID WILSON is an ex prison governor who now lectures in criminology at the University of Central England. He spoke to *Socialist Worker* about prison, guns and crime.



They live in communities that are ignored, and they are ignored within those communities because they are young.

This issue connects all of us because it is about who is valued and who is discarded.

Even if they do stay on at school they may think twice about going to college, and with tuition fees they will think five times about going.

Students now leave universities with £12,500 of debt.

Young people from poor backgrounds simply cannot afford to take that kind of economic risk.

The experience of prison ruins people's family relationships and leaves them isolated and struggling to cope.

That's why two thirds of prisoners are reoffended within two years of getting released. And the figure for young offenders is much higher, probably around 75 percent.

Prison makes the situation much worse for people.

If the crime rate was influenced by sentencing policy, Britain would have the lowest rate of crime in Europe. Many of the best rap artists are talking about what it means to be young and black.

The issues of poverty and social exclusion transpire music.

It costs double the amount of money to send one young person to a young offender institution than it does to send one to Eton College.

I sometimes wonder, if we sent some of the young offenders I have met over the years to Eton, what personal abilities and skills would develop that never get the chance.

IS THERE

ANYTHING WE CAN DO ABOUT GUN CRIME?

GUNS ARE in the foreground of the debate. We have to look at the background.

There are four key issues involved—youth, young black people specifically, poverty, and growing income inequality between rich and poor.

There are two types of gun crime in the inner cities.

There is professional gun crime, which has been around since the 1930s and existed throughout the 1950s and 60s. In this crime guns are used as part of a job just like we use a telephone.

The police usually know who these people are.

The second is the type fuelling the current atmosphere. This is the increasing number of young people in deprived inner cities who want to be somebody, want to be important, want to have a face.

● There are now over 72,500 men, women and children in prison in England and Wales.

● The prison population has been rising steadily since 1993, increasing from 42,000 to today's level.

● There is now a higher percentage of people in prison here than in any other country in Western Europe.

● Overcrowding means that approximately 21,000 prisoners are being held two to a cell designed for one.

● 94 prisoners committed suicide last year, a 22 percent rise on 2001.

● Prison costs £2.2 billion a year. It is an expensive failure.

NEW TV SERIES REWRITES HISTORY

Historian flies flag for bloody British Empire

TIS no coincidence that at a time when British troops are getting ready to invade and occupy Iraq, Channel 4 should televise an expensive celebratory history of the British Empire.

The series is presented by one of the country's leading Thatcherite historians, the appalling Oxford professor Niall Ferguson.

It is accompanied by a lavishly produced, popularly written book, *Empire*, which is confidently expected to become a bestseller.

British imperialism was, on balance, he insists, a good thing. So is the fact that British imperialism has been replaced by US imperialism.

Ferguson's argument is essentially that the British Empire was the vehicle for globalisation, and that despite various atrocities—the slave trade, the Irish Famine, etc—this was a good thing.

It established capitalism as "the optimum system of economic organisation" throughout the world and safeguarded representative institutions and civil liberties.

Moreover, Ferguson argues that whatever criticisms might be made of the British Empire it was finally vindicated by the heroic way in which it sacrificed itself in the Second World War. Its sacrifice prevented the triumph of the far more brutal and murderous empires of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan.

Subsequently the empire went into voluntary liquidation.

These are the bones of his argument but equally important is the mixture of admiration, nostalgia, celebration and indeed positive enthusiasm for empire with which he writes.

Ferguson carries out a very convenient sleight of hand.

He portrays the British Empire as the vehicle of globalisation rather than recognising British capitalism as one player within a wider imperialist system.

The defining characteristic of the British Empire was competition, both military and economic, with rival imperial powers.

His failure to recognise this means that his book contributes nothing at all to the understanding of imperialism, either in the past or today.

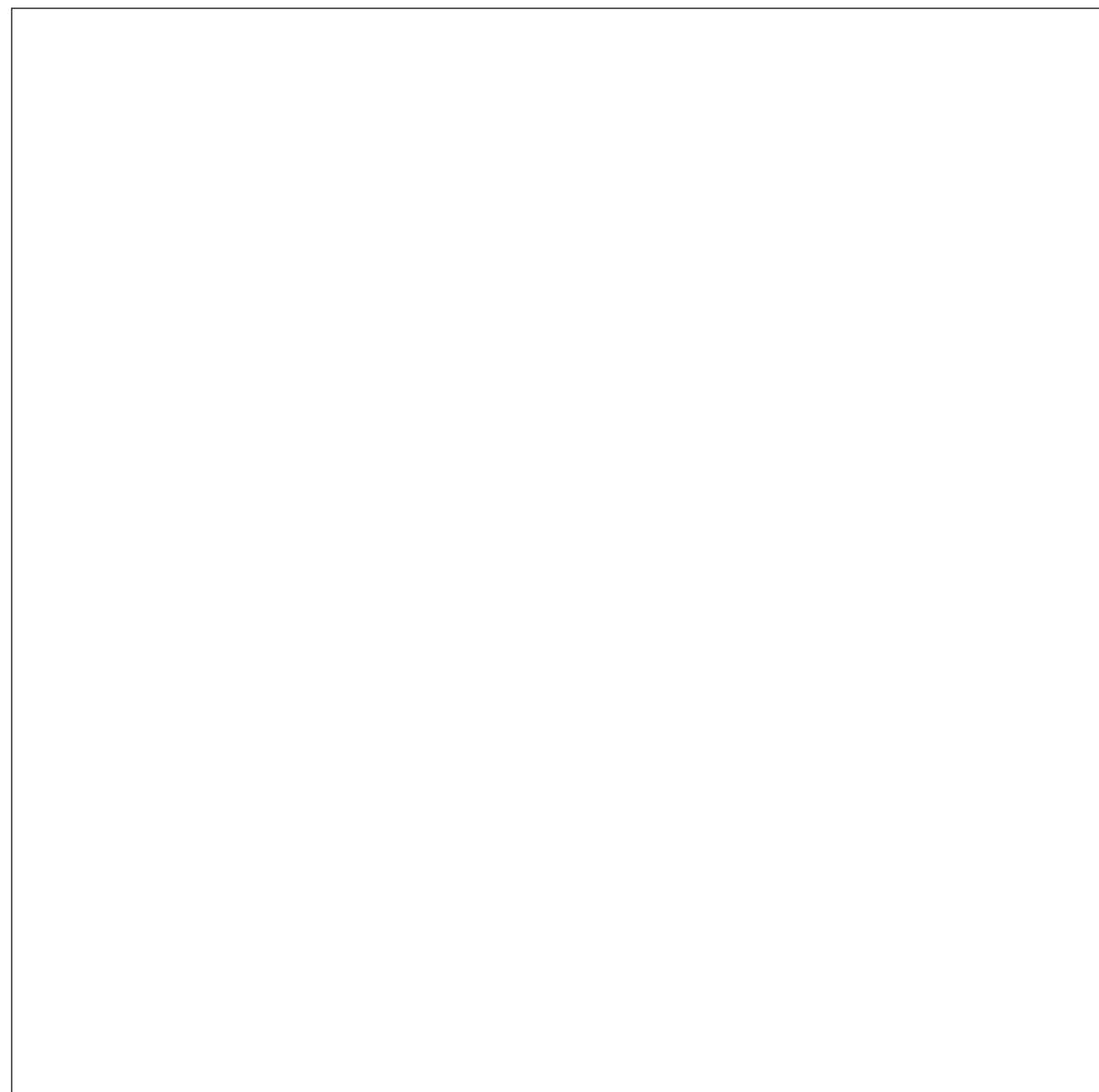
How does Ferguson view that part of the imperialist system controlled by Britain—the part appropriately coloured red on the map?

There is so much wrong with his account that one is really spoilt for choice.

Far from the British state helping along a benevolent economic process, it was in fact responsible for aggression after aggression, using its growing technological superiority to massacre its poorly armed opponents in country after country.

An attack on Iraq today, for example, will not be the first British invasion of that country or even the second, but the fourth in the last 80-odd years.

Iraq was first conquered by Britain



BRITISH ARMY in action, Egypt, 1882. Ferguson sees such military suppression as part of a benevolent process

and a popular revolt suppressed in 1920.

It was forcibly reoccupied in 1941 and serious consideration was given to invading in 1958.

The last Gulf War saw Britain play its role as a satellite of US imperialism.

Iraq, of course, has yet to make any attack on Britain.

Ferguson deals with the Opium Wars with China in less than half a page.

One would never know from his account that Victorian Britain was the greatest drug pusher the world has ever seen. Britain invaded China three times, in 1839-42, 1856-58 and 1860, in order to safeguard this extremely profitable trade.

Britain seized Hong Kong in the process. By the time the Chinese were finally brought to accept that they had been

incorporated into Britain's informal empire, Beijing had been occupied and the emperor's Summer Palace destroyed.

Ferguson looks at such episodes from the British imperialist point of view.

It is useful in this respect to reverse the history and imagine Britain the victim of Chinese imperialism.

Imagine the impact on Britain if China had forced the opium trade on Britain by invasion and massacre, seizing Bristol as a colony, bringing the British government to heel by occupying London and destroying Buckingham Palace.

Ferguson and his like would probably have some difficulty in regarding Chinese imperialism as a force for good.

They find it acceptable to do things to foreigners that would be regarded as

outrageous if done to them.

The argument that the British Empire was vindicated by its part in destroying Nazism is particularly dishonest.

In fact the men running the British Empire had no objection whatsoever to fascism as the domestic policy of either the Italian or German governments in the 1930s. Indeed, they found much to admire.

It was only when Germany re-emerged as a rival imperialism that the likes of Churchill found Nazism abhorrent.

Far from the empire being sacrificed to defeat Nazism, Nazism was only fought to save the empire. The subsequent loss of the British Empire was the consequence of weakness rather than goodwill.

John Newsinger

Idyllic childhood spent in a land of brutal repression

ON A personal note, Ferguson reminisces about an idyllic childhood spent in the newly independent country of Kenya in the 1960s.

He writes that there was still a recognisably colonial Africa.

What is truly astonishing is that these reminiscences are unaccompanied by any mention in the book of the repression dealt out by Britain.

Ferguson does not discuss the Mau Mau rebellion and the methods Britain used to suppress it.

This is despite the fact that the rebellion took place less than ten years before the happy childhood Ferguson

describes.

Britain used torture as a matter of routine.

This meant that hundreds of prisoners were shot and beaten to death, and thousands were interned without trial.

By the time the rebellion was eventually crushed over 1,000 Kenyans had been hanged for being associated with the Mau Mau.

In Kenya the British authorities hanged people for the crime of administering illegal oaths.

And all this happened not in the 1850s but in the 1950s.

Ferguson does not see fit to mention any of this.

Instead, he concentrates on describing what a happy time he had in the aftermath of this brutally repressed rebellion.

For Ferguson the British Empire was a fond memory, one on which the sun will never set.

Ferguson sees these as "the good old days" when Britain really did rule the waves.

For socialists and many other people the British Empire was an atrocity on which the blood never dried.

NIALL FERGUSON—apologising for imperialism

Egypt, 1882

City destroyed so it could be saved

TONY BLAIR'S liberal imperialism is nothing new.

In the 1870s the Liberal leader William Gladstone had bitterly opposed the Conservative government's involvement in Egyptian affairs.

Once in power, Gladstone found British interests in Egypt threatened by the nationalist movement led by an army officer, Arabi Pasha.

There was fear that Egypt might default on its international debt, in which Gladstone himself had a personal investment, and that the security of the Suez Canal would be at risk.

In 1882 the British fleet bombarded Alexandria, destroying much of the historic city.

Then the country was invaded and occupied.

Gladstone insisted that this was for the good of the Egyptian people and was carried through to liberate them from tyranny.

He made it clear that personally he wanted Arabi hanged, but this would have been going too far for other members of the Liberal government.

Britain was not thrown out of Egypt until 70 years later.

Tibet, 1904

Expedition that led to horrific massacre

NIALL FERGUSON mentions "the expedition to the Dalai Lama's court in 1904", which sounds harmless enough.

If fact, this description of the events is positively misleading.

Britain launched a military invasion of Tibet in 1904. British troops massacred the Dalai Lama's army and brought his government to heel.

Presumably, only military intervention prevented the mighty Tibetan prayer-wheels of mass destruction from threatening world peace.

Palestine, 1938

Britain blazed the trail of repression

THE METHODS used by the Israeli army against Palestinians in the West Bank have shocked the world.

In fact, they are modelled on those pioneered by Britain when it suppressed the Palestinian revolt of 1936-9.

In August 1938 British troops destroyed much of the town of Jenin, blowing up houses and rounding up the male population in reprisal for the shooting of a British official.

Jenin was reduced to rubble by the Israeli army in a vicious act of collective punishment last year.

Links

JOHN NEWSINGER is the author of numerous books and articles relating to the history of the British Empire.

These include *Dangerous Men: The SAS and Popular Culture*, *Orwell's Politics*, *United Irishman*, *British Counterinsurgency: From Palestine to Northern Ireland* and *British Intervention and the Greek Revolution*.

Most of these books are available from Bookmarks, phone 020 7637 1848 or go to www.bookmarks.uk.com

in my view

The gang who rule over us

I REMEMBER it like it was just yesterday—the day 14 years ago when four men carrying hammers walked into the nightclub I was DJing in and proceeded to smash up the record decks.

Apparently these hammer-wielding psychopaths came from a rival sound system which wanted to put us out of business.

It was my first and hopefully my last brush with the activities of the criminal underworld.

In the past two weeks two stunning new films have been released which vividly portray the role of gangs in shaping city life.

The first is Martin Scorsese's epic *Gangs of New York*, which tells the largely unknown story of 19th century gang warfare in Manhattan.

One of the gangs, the Natives, not only profit from taxing petty thieves but also carry out violent attacks on Irish immigrants who, they fear, are going to take their jobs and already meagre homes.

In response to these attacks the Irish form their own gangs to defend themselves and in turn resort to criminal activities to fund their activities.

The other film is the breathtakingly brilliant *City of God*. It's an exhilarating Brazilian movie which follows gang rivalry in Rio de Janeiro's poorest neighbourhoods during the 1960s and 70s.

Cinematic vision

And look out for the chicken—in my opinion it should get an Oscar!

Today, New Labour ministers like Kim Howells like to portray gangs and gun violence as a product of rap music and Jamaican youth.

What both films show is that gang violence has nothing to do with music but has everything to do with poverty, desperation and social conditions.

What strikes you about Scorsese's cinematic vision of mid-19th century New York is the squalor and poverty—very like the London portrayed in a Dickens novel.

In fact these Brazilian and New York gangs mirror capitalism.

The only difference is that under capitalism rival firms are driven out by ruthless competition, whereas these gangs literally wipe out the competition.

Is this what Karl Marx meant by primitive accumulation?

Protection payments

These films are incredibly violent but neither glamorises violence or gang life.

One of the striking features of both films is the directors' ability to portray some of the most vicious, violent and alienated young men and explain why they have become what they are—victims of a brutal system.

Finally *Gangs of New York* shows that there is another much more powerful but never-mentioned gang operating in New York.

This gang is comprised of police officers who happily take protection payments off the street gangs and politicians who use the gangs to win influence in working class communities.

The final component of this gang is the idle rich playing one working class gang off against the other to stop them heading up town to steal their silverware.

Funnily enough, seeing the Scorsese film reminded me of a regular occurrence that used to take place in that club I used to DJ in.

Every week a person would come round and collect money from the club owner on behalf of the police widows and orphans fund.

And just like clockwork my manager paid his £20.

Still it was nice to know that in this case the money was going to a good cause.

by MARTIN SMITH

film

City of violence, despair and hope

by ROGER COX

CITY OF GOD is a powerful film that every reader of *Socialist Worker* should make an effort to see.

It is a Brazilian film with subtitles, but don't let that put you off.

The "City of God" is the name of a run-down slum, called a favela, on the edges of the giant Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro.

The film explores the lives of people who had to live there through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

The film techniques echo those of Hollywood movies from *Goodfellas* to *Pulp Fiction* and it draws on documentary traditions too.

Many of the film's cast are not professional actors but people who live in the conditions portrayed.

The film has a sharp tempo and keeps you focused as the stories bring together the hopes and despair of the people in the favela.

Trapped in desperate poverty, their only ways forward are to find a job to escape the slum or, as most young men do, join a drugs gang.

The main story is centred on two young men.

One wants to be a photographer. The other becomes the violent gang leader.

The film records the almost endless violence that marks life in the city.

In one instance, a child shoots all the people in a brothel dead, following a raid to relieve the clients of their money.

The raid on the brothel was the child's idea, but his older brother and his gang forced him to be the lookout

POINTING THE gun at society

instead of joining the raid. The murders are his revenge for that.

Following this the child grows to become the principal gang leader in the city.

Side by side with the bloodletting are the hopes and expectations of the young people in the slum.

It is the balancing of these two sides of the city that drives the film along.

I remember another Brazilian film made in the 1980s set in the favela of Santa Marta.

It has none of the drama, pace and impact of *City of God*.

It does show, though,

the vast range of popular movements that held life together in the slums, from work parties and different religions, to samba groups.

It shows a collective response to the problems people faced. This side of life is not shown in *City of God*.

People's hopes in Brazil

today are high with the election of the Workers Party's Lula as president.

I hope that the picture *City of God* so powerfully reflects is only a partial truth, and that there are movements in the favelas ready to fight for another world. But don't miss this wonderful film.

book

Thrilling tale of anti-capitalism

by LAURENCE GREEN

THE BITTER and bloody Israeli-Palestinian conflict is, you would imagine, hardly the subject for satire.

Palestinian film-maker Elia Suleiman has achieved the impossible with his latest film *Divine Interventions*. It presents a funny and profound look at the situation.

The film follows a series of interrelated characters as they struggle to maintain a veneer of normal life in Nazareth.

It shows the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory in painfully human terms.

While caring for his ailing father in Jerusalem, Suleiman tries to maintain a love affair with a Palestinian woman living in Ramallah.

She is barred from crossing the Israeli army checkpoint between the two cities.

The lovers' intimate moments take place in a deserted lot beside the checkpoint.

From here they watch the daily hostilities played out between Israeli troops and Palestinian civilians.

Divine Interventions is a topical and thought-provoking film.

Suleiman took great delight in blowing up an Israeli tank—even though it was a French

tank painted to look like an Israeli one. "I was the chief of operations on the set," says Suleiman. "It was I who gave the orders and it was I who did the countdown for the explosion and said 'Action', which in this case was rendered 'Fire'."

Hostilities

The film unfolds with a series of fantasy sequences and sight gags that depict the absurd and perverse manifestations of the conflict in everyday events and jealousies.

Suleiman brings a surreal sense of humour to satirise the tragic situation of the Palestinians.

A good example is when Suleiman releases a balloon with the image of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat over Jerusalem.

The balloon glides over the city to the amazement of a group of Israeli soldiers and comes to rest on the Dome of the Rock, one of Jerusalem's major buildings and one of the holiest sites in Islam.

THE NEW book *Small Acts of Treachery* by Kitty Fitzgerald begins in a secret military barracks, where Eileen Mahoney is being detained by the state as a suspected terrorist.

Brought up by her socialist father, Mahoney has been involved in the major movements of the last three decades, from civil rights in Ireland to the 1984-5 miners' strike.

Her investigation into high-level corruption within an aid agency brings her into conflict with a covert global organisation which holds power behind closed doors.

Those who she had come to trust become

enthralled by the system and betray her.

Forming an unlikely alliance with her secret service interrogator, Mahoney challenges the multinational, defying the power of the secret state and global elites.

This is a thoroughly readable novel which causes you to reflect on the power of the multinationals, the state and most importantly the resistance to them.

■ Small Acts of Treachery by Kitty Fitzgerald is available from Bookmarks for £7.99. Phone 020 7637 1848 or go to www.bookmarks.uk.com

meetings, forums and events | tel: 020 7538 5821 | e-mail: forums@socialistworker.co.uk

IF YOUR AREA ISN'T SHOWN PHONE THE NUMBER ABOVE



Big ideas in informal settings

DONCASTER
Vietnam: when the US was humbled

Wed 22 Jan, 7pm, The Point, South Parade.
With Chris Bambery.

DUDLEY
Does the media control our ideas?

Thu 16 Jan, 8pm, Claugton Community Centre, Blowers Green.

GATESHEAD
Marx: the first anti-capitalist?

Wed 22 Jan, 7.30pm, Gateshead Library, Prince Consort Rd.
With Julie Waterson.

GLoucester

The Black Panthers

Thu 23 Jan, 5.30pm, Warehouse, Parliament St.

HARLOW

Is violence ever justified?

Wed 29 Jan, 8pm, Polly's Pantry, Wych Elm.
With Kambiz Boomla.

HUDDERSFIELD

Can the trade unions challenge capitalism?

Thu 23 Jan, 6pm, Coffeurovision, Wood St.

LEEDS BEESTON

Why is war central to capitalism?

Wed 22 Jan, 7pm, Tunstall Road Community Centre.

LEEDS HAREHILLS

Malcolm X and the struggle for black liberation

Wed 22 Jan, 7.30pm, Pakistani Community Centre.

LEEDS HEADINGLEY

Can the trade unions challenge capitalism?

Sun 19 Jan, 6pm, Deli Katessen Cafe, Hyde Park Corner.

LEICESTER

Why is war central to capitalism?

Mon 20 Jan, 7.30pm, Cafe Mozart, London Rd.

LIVERPOOL AIGBURTH

The grand strategy of the American Empire

Wed 22 Jan, 7.30pm, Collect Gallery, Laske Lane.

LIVERPOOL TOXTETH

The grand strategy of the American Empire

Thu 23 Jan, 7.30pm, Yemeni Community Centre, Lodge Lane.

SOCIALIST WORKER ACTIVISTS SCHOOL

THIS WEEKEND

LONDON 18-19 January

Phone 020 7538 5821 or e-mail enquiries@swp.org.uk

LUTON

Vietnam: when US imperialism was humbled

Mon 20 Jan, 7.30pm, CoMotion Coffee Bar (next to Thistle Hotel).

MANCHESTER LONGSIGHT

Marx: the first anti-capitalist?

Thu 16 Jan, 7.30pm, Misty's Veggie Cafe, Stockport Rd (nr Asda).

MANCHESTER PRESTWICH

Do we live in a democracy?

Thu 16 Jan, 7.30pm, Caribbean Retreat, Clifton Rd (off Buoy New Rd).

MANCHESTER RUSHOLME

Imperialism in the Middle East

Thu 16 Jan, 6.30pm, Jaffa Restaurant, Wilmslow Rd.

NEATH

Do the trade unions need political representation?

Thu 16 Jan, 7.30pm, Mocha Jo's (nr Safeway).

NEWCASTLE WEST END

The bloody history of British imperialism

Wed 29 Jan, 7.30pm, Linwood Centre (off West Rd).

NEWPORT

Terrorism: is it the response of the dispossessed?

Tue 21 Jan, 7.30pm, USR Room, Newport Centre.

NORTHAMPTON

Can workers run society?

Thu 16 Jan, 7pm, Cafe Msaada, Kettering Rd (nr Picturedome).

NOTTINGHAM CITY CENTRE

What would real democracy be like?

Wed 29 Jan, 1pm, Rat and Parrot, Woolaton St.

NOTTINGHAM HYSON GREEN

Lenin: a revolutionary for today?

Wed 29 Jan, 7pm, Forestfield Community Centre, Sturton St.

NOTTINGHAM SHERWOOD

Imperialism: the armed wing of globalisation?

Tue 28 Jan, 7.30pm, The Place, Melrose St.

NOTTINGHAM SHERWOOD

Lenin: a revolutionary for today?

Tue 28 Jan, 7pm, Forestfield Community Centre, Sturton St.

ROCHESTER

Are women equal today?

Thu 16 Jan, 8pm, Eon Internet Cafe, Rochester High St.

SCUNTHORPE

Karl Marx: the first anti-capitalist?

Mon 20 Jan, 7pm, Central Community Centre, Lindum St (opp bus station).

NOTTINGHAM CITY CENTRE

The grand strategy of the American Empire

Thu 23 Jan, 6pm, Coffee Revolution, Church St.

SHEDFIELD FIRTH PARK

Vietnam: when the US was humbled

Tue 28 Jan, 7.30pm, Brushes Community Centre, West Quadrant.

SHEDFIELD HEELEY

How capitalism underdeveloped Africa

Wed 22 Jan, 7.30pm, Hartley Street Community Centre.

SHEDFIELD NETHEREDGE

Vietnam: when the US was humbled

Sat 1 Feb, 7.30pm, TC's internet cafe, Abbeydale Rd.

OXFORD

Venezuela: is Chavez facing a Chile-style coup?

Wed 29 Jan, 7.30pm, Mitre, High St.

PLYMOUTH

What would real democracy be like?

Mon 20 Jan, 7.15pm, Martinsgate Education Centre, Brightside (behind Staples).

PRESTON

Marx: the first anti-capitalist?

Tue 28 Jan, 7.30pm, Unity Community Centre, Shepherd St.

READING

Che Guevara: the man behind the T-shirt

Mon 27 Jan, 7.30pm, Reading International Solidarity Centre, London St.

ST ALBANS

Are people too selfish for socialism?

Mon 20 Jan, 7.30pm, upstairs, Trinity Church (cnr Beaconsfield Rd/Victoria St).

ST ALBANS

Che Guevara: the man behind the T-shirt

Mon 27 Jan, 7.30pm, Reading International Solidarity Centre, London St.

EAST HAM
How do we get rid of sexism?

Wed 22 Jan, 6.30pm, Indo Ceylon Cafe, St John's Rd (off High St North).

ELTHAM
How do we fight fascism?

Tue 28 Jan, 7.30pm, St Mary's Community Centre, Eltham High St.

ENFIELD
Can war lead to revolution?

Wed 22 Jan, 7.30pm, Edmonton Green Leisure Centre, Plevna Rd.

EUSTON
The grand strategy of the American Empire

Wed 29 Jan, 6.30pm, Cafe Muse, Museum St.

FINSBURY PARK
Can the trade unions challenge capitalism?

Thu 23 Jan, 7.30pm, Gadz Cafe, Clifton Terr (opp Finsbury Park E).

HACKNEY HOMERTON
Vietnam: when the US was humbled

Wed 22 Jan, 7.30pm, Barnabas Centre, Homerton High St.

HACKNEY STAMFORD HILL
Can the trade unions challenge capitalism?

Thu 16 Jan, 7.30pm, Cyprus House Cafe, Manor Parade (cnr Stamford Hill).

HOLBORN
Martin Luther King

Wed 29 Jan, 6pm, Africa Centre, King St, Covent Garden.

ILFORD
Gandhi, non-violence and Indian independence

Thu 23 Jan, 7.30pm, Kohi-Noor Restaurant, 52 Ilford Lane.

LADBROKE GROVE
Venezuela: is Chavez facing a Chile-style coup?

Mon 21 Jan, Green Room, Paddington Arts Centre, Woodford Rd.

LEYTONSTONE
Israel: the hijack state

Wed 29 Jan, 7.30pm, Prospero's, Church Lane.

MUSWELL HILL
Why is war central to capitalism?

Thu 16 Jan, 7.30pm, Sasa Thai Restaurant.

NEW CROSS
Anti-capitalism: does the movement need political parties?

Tue 28 Jan, 7pm, Moonbow Jake's, New Cross Rd.

SHOREDITCH
Is the US Empire invincible?

Thu 16 Jan, 8pm, Barley Mow (cnr Curtain Rd/Rivington St).

VICTORIA
The grand strategy of the American Empire

Thu 16 Jan, 6.30pm, City Harvest Cafe, Buckingham Palace Rd.

WALTHAMSTOW
Revolution: is it possible?

Thu 23 Jan, 7.45pm, Quaker Meeting House, 1a Jewel Rd (off Hoe St).

WOOLWICH
Anti-capitalism: does the movement need political parties?

Wed 29 Jan, 7.30pm, Earl of Chatham, Thomas St.

where we stand

INDEPENDENT WORKING CLASS ACTION
The workers create all the wealth under capitalism. A new society can only be constructed when they collectively seize control of that wealth and plan its production and distribution.

REVOLUTION NOT REFORM
The present system cannot be patched up or reformed as the established Labour and trade union leaders say. It has to be overthrown.

THERE IS NO PARLIAMENTARY ROAD
The structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class.

<p

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E-mail letters@socialistworker.co.uk

or send to

letters

PO Box 82 London E3 3LH

postal points

■EVERYONE I know who saw Bremner, Bird and Fortune's attack on the war on Iraq on Channel 4 recently agrees it was brilliant.

It's an easy thing to lampoon what George Bush and Tony Blair are saying.

But these three comedians did much more.

They used hilarious sketches to explain the history of Western involvement with Iraq going back to the First World War.

If anyone you know videoed it, get a copy. Better still, organise a showing to build support for the anti-war movement.

Are there any plans to put this show on live?

□ GEDIZ HUSSEIN,
Merseyside

■EVERYONE should tune in to *Jeremy Hardy Speaks to the Nation* at 6.30pm on Radio 4 on Wednesday evenings.

Radio 4 presents some interesting material, mostly at times unsuited to working people.

Michael Rosen's five-minute talk (tucked in between a load of waffle on a Sunday morning) explaining the war against Iraq to school children in 20 years time was brilliant.

Please add forthcoming items on radio to the TV/book/music page.

□ JULIE BOSTON,
Bristol

■ I AM looking for anti-war, political or socially aware poems with a view to publishing them.

If you're interested contact Emmylou Books, 24 Ferrymead, Canvey Island, Essex SS8 9TT.

□ BOB CHAPMAN,
Essex

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various building sites.

There he organised against dangerous working conditions and for union recognition. He was frequently victimised. Some of his experiences were recorded in Channel 4's *Secret History* series.

Tom was a loyal member of the Communist Party, and we in the Socialist Workers Party had some fierce arguments with him, but always recognised his energy and activism.

obituary

Tom Durkin

TOM DURKIN—longtime chair of Brent Trades Council, notably at the time of the Grunwick's strike in the 1970s—died just before Christmas at the age of 87.

Tom was in every sense a big man, with a booming voice sometimes augmented by his home-made sound systems.

Born in Ireland to a poor family, he came to England in the 1930s, tramped from Liverpool to London and eventually found work on

Football fans determined to hammer the racists

AS A West Ham fan for 25 years I am disgusted at the signing of Lee Bowyer.

There has always been a small Nazi element among West Ham supporters, but the majority want nothing to do with racism.

I leafleted for West Ham Against the Nazis, both in the 1970s against the NF and in the 1990s against the BNP.

Our leaflets were well received and we sold many badges.

The club supports Kick

Racism Out of Football, and makes noises about involving the local Asian community.

It is ideally situated to be the first Premiership team to establish Asian players, in the way that Clyde Best led the way for black players when he played for the Hammers.

How can this happen with a person like Bowyer in the team?

In December 1996 Bowyer was found guilty of affray after verbally abusing Asian staff at a McDonald's in east London and throwing a chair.

He was fined £4,000 for that incident.

He was accused in January 2000 of attacking Asian student Sarfraz Najeib outside a nightclub. He was found not guilty but a civil case is pending between the Najeib family and Bowyer.

His signing is a snub to the Asian community and will only gladden the hearts of the racists.

Anti-racists will continue to campaign at Upton Park.

I will not be cheering if the cost of Premiership survival is making a hero out of Lee Bowyer—the club should admit its mistake and send him packing.

□ SUE CALDWELL, North London

Support begins at home

SUNDAY'S Channel 4 documentary *Mugabe's Secret Famine* showed that food is being used as a political weapon in Zimbabwe.

But it was made by right wing journalist Peter Osborne of the *Spectator*. This is the Tory rag which opposed sanctions on apartheid South Africa and is currently cheer-leading New Labour's racist attacks on refugees.

David Blunkett's new legislation is making the lives of asylum seekers hell. Just before Christmas he callously shut the main escape route from Zimbabwe.

Many black Zimbabwean refugees are highly politicised and refuse to become victims. They include workers whose revolt against neo-liberalism built the opposition MDC from below.

Now they find themselves criminalised, dispersed and forced to struggle again.

We must ensure Zimbabwean asylum seekers are welcomed here and integrated into our struggles against racism, war and the market.

This includes building a campaign against the Asylum Bill which is led by refugees and actively supported by the labour movement.

We should also support the weekly Saturday vigils outside the Zimbabwean embassy, which has become a focal point for the exiled opposition movement, and pass trade union motions that condemn Mugabe's repression and Blair's hypocrisy in equal measure.

The right must not be given a free run on Zimbabwe. Genuine solidarity includes stepping up the fight with the enemy at home.

□ GAVIN CAPPS, Southampton

VIEWS ON WAR... VIEWS ON WAR... VIEWS ON WAR...

Trouble on t'moor

THERE HAVE been some strange goings-on on the moors of North Yorkshire.

Two weeks ago members of the Scarborough Coalition Against War And Globalisation (SCAWAG) got wind that the local Labour MP, Lawrie Quinn, would be holding a consultation meeting.

It was about the upgrading of the Fylingdales base as part of Bush's Son of Star Wars scheme.

The venue was not Scarborough or Whitby, or indeed any population centre threatened by the Fylingdales upgrade.

It was held at the Inn on the Moor at Goathland, a remote village whose best claim to fame is its location role in the TV drama series *Heartbeat*.

And the time of the meeting? Why, lunchtime of course—the most convenient time of day possible for working people, students or anyone else with a busy daytime schedule.

And the meeting was by invitation only with a fixed agenda.

Then on Monday morning we learnt that the North York Moors were awash with police in preparation for the arrival of Geoff

Hoon, the defence secretary. Three of our members set off for Goathland, suitably equipped with a tape recorder.

As a result, we're now in possession of a full record of what transpired at the Inn on the Moor.

There was a great deal of concern and apprehension about the handover of Fylingdales to the US from those present at the meeting.

Among them was the chairperson of the local Constituency Labour Party, who spoke up vociferously.

Minion

Input from our group helped the *Scarborough Evening News* run an editorial highly critical of the stage-managed meeting.

The message to Geoff Hoon and his minion Lawrie Quinn from the people of North Yorkshire is simple.

The very least we expect is that you engage in genuine, broad-based, democratic discussion of the issues.

Focus-group consultation over tea and biscuits high up in the moors is yet another instance of New Labour control-freakery seeking to stifle real debate.

We didn't let them get away with it.

□ SUE RAM,
Scarborough

Chief hypocrite

MOST politicians are liars, tricksters and scumbags.

But none are more corrupt than those who wield power in the US.

The scandal that has emerged around one of George Bush's biggest hawks, Donald Rumsfeld, shows that.

As you reported last week, he now stands accused of supplying Saddam Hussein with the ingredi-

ents to build chemical weapons in the 1980s.

He says he is making no comment about these allegations.

The collaboration between the administrations of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher with Saddam is well known.

But Rumsfeld must stand out as the prince of hypocrites.

□ READER

FYLINGDALES: soon to be part of Bush's Star Wars

Fined to fund further nukes

ACTIVIST Allen O'Keefe was ordered last week to pay £750 compensation to the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston for cutting a small piece of fence at the site.

He took part in the Trident Ploughshares disarmament camp there in May 2001.

Allen says of his trial at Newbury magistrates' court:

"The magistrate was obviously attempting to make an example of me. I will not be paying the order, especially since the cash would go to the Atomic Weapons Establishment."

"There is no way I am contributing to a factory whose purpose is to make Trident warheads which are appalling weapons of mass destruction."

"The compensation order bears no relation to the slight damage that was done and I am considering an appeal."

Ulla Roder, a Danish Trident Ploughshares pledger currently living in the UK, will now be tried on 18 February on a charge related to Aldermaston.

Allen's compensation order brings to over £52,000 the total of fines, compensation orders and court costs imposed on Trident Ploughshares activists since the campaign began four years ago.

Very little of that has been paid. Campaign members remain determined to challenge Britain's deployment of illegal nuclear weapons.

□ DAVID MACKENZIE, Trident Ploughshares

Britain's colonial legacy

THE PEOPLE of Iraq have suffered from continuing sanctions since the 1991 war.

This has resulted in the deaths of over 6,000 children a month, according to the United Nations.

That number does not include those who have been killed by the various bombing campaigns launched by the US and UK over that period.

I dare not think how many times this figure of 6,000 will be multiplied if this seemingly inevitable war is allowed to occur.

Opposition to the war now includes the pope and top celebrities like Susan Sarandon and Johnny Depp.

But too many of our leading politicians seem to be basing their judgement on their own interests and not on the reality of what war will mean.

Iraq is a former colony of Britain. The British were the first to use chemical weapons against Iraqi people.

The people of Iraq, and of the rest of the Middle East, will not take kindly to being treated as pawns in Mr Blair's game of returning to old methods to resolve international disputes.

□ HUSSEIN AL-ALAK, Coalition Against Sanctions and War on Iraq

□ SARAH COX, for Brent Socialist Workers Party

OPPOSITION IN Zimbabwe

ALL REPORTS MUST BE IN BY 12 NOON MONDAY

In brief**Kingsland School**

Action to back sacked worker

TEACHERS AT Kingsland School in Hackney, east London, were set to strike on Thursday of this week in defence of our sacked National Union of Teachers (NUT) rep, Indro Sen.

This follows an overwhelming vote by NUT members at the school. Union members in four other secondary schools in Hackney are to hold an indicative vote over whether to ballot over the sacking too.

We see the sacking of Indro Sen, a highly respected maths teacher who has been at the school for 20 years, as a serious attack on our union while the authorities are pushing to shut the whole school.

NUT general secretary Doug McAvoy says, "Sen's dismissal is, in the union's view, unfair and an attack on teacher trade unionism. It is important that this attack is resisted. The union concludes that the only reasonable explanation for the treatment of Indro Sen was the

fact that he had for a long time been a vociferous and tenacious union representative."

Sen was sacked for failing to return maths coursework immediately when he was told to by management.

But the exam board Edexcel that checked the coursework found it had been marked in an exemplary fashion and students got their GCSE marks on time in August of last year.

The school management has drawn up plans to try to break Thursday's strike by bringing in supply teachers.

This is highly aggressive move and threatens to create chaos among our students.

Hackney council has handed over responsibility for schools to the Learning Trust quango.

The trust plans to close Kingsland School and Laburnum Primary, and replace comprehensive secondary schooling with City Academies.

These open the door to attacks on teachers' national pay and conditions. They are part

of the government dismantling of comprehensive education.

We see Sen's sacking as a softening-up process to weaken opposition to the closure of Kingsland and Laburnum and to the wider attacks on education in Hackney.

Recent inspections show the school is improving.

There are not enough secondary school places in Hackney. That, combined with, the campaign to stop the closure of Kingsland has already convinced Hackney's Schools Organising Committee to vote by three to two against closing it.

The decision now rests with a government-appointed adjudicator, which no one can place their faith in.

There will be a march against the two school closures on Saturday 1 February.

SHEILA McGREGOR, NUT rep (personal capacity)

■ Send messages of support c/o HTA, 2 Wellman Street, Hackney, London E8, or e-mail hta@cix.co.uk

Roger Sylvester

TWO HUNDRED people gathered in noisy protest at Tottenham police station in north London last Saturday to remember Roger Sylvester.

His father said, "On 11 January 1999 Roger Sylvester, a 30 year old

black man, was restrained on his doorstep by eight officers from Tottenham. He sustained numerous injuries and died a week later.

"Four years on we have yet to hear the truth of Roger's death. We want

justice and we are not going to stop fighting until we get it."

His family have now decided to seek a judicial review of the Crown Prosecution Service's decision not to prosecute anyone.

Firefighters

THE SACKING of Hampshire Fire Brigades Union (FBU) activist Simon Green on Tuesday of next week, the day of the national 24-hour strike.

■ **Donations and messages of support can be sent c/o Basingstoke Fire Station, West Ham Close, Basingstoke.**

■ **WEST Midlands FBU activist Steve Godward's appeal against victimisation was to take place this Thursday morning.**

The brigade sacked Steve on charges which he denies and which arose from last year's strikes.

The national FBU backed a lobby of the hearing, and the local union has asked for permission to ballot for industrial action if Steve's appeal is unsuccessful.

■ **BOB POUNDER**, who has been suspended by the FBU from his position as Manchester brigade secretary, has been told verbally that his case will be heard by the union's national executive on 17 February.

Bob was disciplined after speaking out against the decision to suspend strike action before Christmas in return for pay.

"It has only been donations from hundreds of FBU members that have enabled me and my family to survive."

A meeting in defence of

officials and activists to argue for what they see as the way forward even if it clashes with the national leadership.

Anti-Nazi

ANTI-NAZIS were out campaigning around the Mixenden ward in Halifax last Sunday against the British National Party's plans to stand a candidate in a council by-election on Thursday of next week.

More than 30 people joined in leafleting houses in the area with 1,500 Don't Vote Nazi leaflets and got a positive response.

A further mass leafleting activity is planned for this Sunday 19 January: assemble 12 noon, Asda car park, Battinson Road, off Queen's Road, Pellon.

■ **For more details contact the Anti Nazi League—phone 020 7924 0333 or go to www.anl.org.uk**

■ **A NEW group has been set up in response to the rise in racist attacks in the Eltham area of south east London. Greenwich United Against Racism and Fascism is holding a public meeting on Wednesday 5 February at 6.30pm in Progress Hall, Admiral Seymour Road, Eltham.**

Hackney

LIBRARY WORKERS and their supporters in Hackney, east London, picketed last Saturday against the New Labour council's strike-busting manoeuvres.

Library strikes have happened every Saturday for a year, since the council withdrew extra payments for working at the weekend. It is trying to reopen three libraries on Saturdays using specially employed staff.

Incredibly, the regional Unison union officials had failed to follow the legal requirements to make the strike official on Saturday. So staff were left confused and divided.

It is important that there are big pickets at the three libraries this Saturday, which is supposed to be an official strike.

■ **Picket this Saturday, 18 January, from 8.30am at the Technology and Learning Centre, Shoreditch and Stoke Newington libraries.**

Anti-war

■ **CARLISLE** HAD the biggest meeting for years last Thursday when 180 people gathered at a Stop the War Coalition rally.

Maxim Ford said, "There were councillors, a group of three ex-soldiers who were suffering from post-traumatic stress, people from the churches and local trade unionists."

■ **AN ATTEMPT** by Swindon Labour MPs Michael Wills and Julia Drown to hold a pro-war public meeting backfired last Saturday.

Only three out of 200 people supported the war.

The angry meeting asked probing questions and heckled as the MPs said that although only a small minority support war the government should attack Iraq anyway.

ANDY NEWMAN

■ **BILLY BRAGG** surprised hundreds of anti-war supporters by appearing unannounced at a packed fundraiser in Exeter on Friday of last week. "Give Peace a Dance" attracted 400 people to the Exeter Phoenix.

Prospect

SOME 600 workers at the Scottish Agricultural College (SAC) held a three-hour strike on Thursday of last week over pay.

Alan Denny, national officer in Scotland for the workers' Prospect union, said, "The membership is rock solid. Over 300 people attended meetings across the country."

The workers have not been offered a pay rise.

"If management offer zero percent, we've got zero tolerance of them," said Joy Gladstone, Prospect convenor of the

Jaguar

WORKERS AT Jaguar Halewood on Merseyside, members of the Amicus union, narrowly voted against a strike over pay last week.

It now looks likely that union members will take action short of a strike.

NUJ

■ **JOURNALISTS AT Newsquest Bradford** are balloting for strike action after rejecting a 2 percent pay offer.

The National Union of Journalists' chapel (workplace branch) has demanded a rise of at least £2,000 per year after the company had a 17 percent increase in profits.

Action last year by NUJ members at Bradford, including the Bradford Telegraph & Argus and weekly titles, sparked a wave of strikes across provincial and national newspapers for the first time in a decade.

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ANDY NEWMAN

■ **BILLY BRAGG** surprised hundreds of anti-war supporters by appearing unannounced at a packed fundraiser in Exeter on Friday of last week.

Mark Lindsey was one of the negotiators who helped secure pay rises of up to 12 percent after last summer's strike over low pay.

Jaguar's attempt to impose tougher working conditions is provoking discontent among workers.

One Amicus member in Halewood told Socialist Worker, "There is still everything to play for."

But a week after the dispute Mark was selected for redundancy.

The chapel has already won 100 percent support in a strike ballot to defend Mark and will be meeting this week to decide its next move.

■ **Fax Doug Melloy, editor of the Rotherham Advertiser, on 01709 515 364 demanding Mark's reinstatement. E-mail messages of support to markalindsey@ hotmail.com**

■ **NUJ** members at Yorkshire Post Newspapers have won new minimum pay rates which mean rises of up to 30 percent, including newly qualified journalists starting on £18,000.

■ **A BALLOT** of all NUJ members across the Trinity Mirror Group over the pension scandal was expected to be confirmed at a group-wide union meeting later this week.

NUJ MEMBERS

Peter Brook's *Tell Me Lies* and Peter Whitehead's *Benefit of the Doubt*, 7.30pm, Camden Centre, Euston Road, London (King's Cross ↗). Entry £12 (£8 concessions).

Saturday 18 January ● Stop the war—rally, 12 noon, City Hall, Cathays Park, Cardiff.

● No war on Iraq—regional march and rally, 12 noon, Lister Park (Oak Lane entrance), Manningham Road, Bradford.

● Stop the war—march, assemble 12 noon, Myrtle Parade, Liverpool.

Sunday 19 January ● US revisited: Vietnam then, Iraq now. Panel discussion with Tony Benn, Glenda Jackson and Peter Brook. Screenings of two films—

housing.org.uk for details. **Saturday 8 February** ● Anti Nazi League national conference, Manchester. Phone 020 7924 0333 for details.

Saturday 15 February ● National demonstration against the war, 12 noon, Embankment ↗, London. Called by Stop the War Coalition. For more info phone 020 7053 2135 or go to www.stopwar.org.uk

● Demonstration against the war, Glasgow. Assemble 11am, George Square.

Wednesday 29 January ● Defend Council Housing lobby of parliament and rally, 1-3pm, Central Hall, Westminster, London. Phone 020 7515 2646 or 07939 951 375 for details, or go to www.defendcouncilsws.org.uk

ALL REPORTS MUST BE IN BY 12 NOON MONDAY

Bus workers

Work till you drop? No way, say strikers

SOME 350 bus drivers working for the First Group multinational in Norwich went on strike from Monday of last week in protest at working long hours.

"Our work is so tiring and stressful. When I get home I just sit there, crashed out in an armchair. That's not good for my family—or for the public, if I'm driving when I feel like that," said driver Sam Stelling.

Their stand has won wide support locally, as many workers face long hours and back the strikers' argument that safety should be a priority in public transport.

The drivers' seven-day strike is also a breakthrough on the buses where action has mainly been limited to one or two days.

"It's no good just doing a one-day strike. We know the company can stand one day. But they are losing a lot more money in a seven-day strike," said another driver, Steve.

It is the first time the majority of the drivers, members of the TGWU union, have been on strike.

They showed their determination with a 91.7 percent vote for action on an 85 percent turnout.

The dispute began after new managing director Barry Pybis imposed an increase in driving hours in October last year.

"It has meant drivers are spending longer periods behind



BUS DRIVERS on the picket line in Norwich fighting against long working hours

the wheel," explained driver Dave Manningham.

"Drivers in Norwich haven't had to drive beyond four hours eight minutes at a stretch since 1987."

"Now he has put that up to five hours and we think he wants to try to up that in the future. This is a company whose pre-tax profits last year were £156.7 million."

Jerry added, "Some drivers end up working rest days to get enough money. That means they could be doing 56-60 hours, or even more, in a week."

Robert said, "I won't work rest days because I want to spend time with my family. But that means my last wage packet was £188 for a 44-hour week."

"The strike has turned the atmosphere at work upside down. If six months ago you had said we'd be on strike nobody would have believed that," said Dave Manningham.

"But we'd had enough. Seven years ago drivers even accepted a pay cut. People bent over backwards for the company."

"Now our strike has halted the company. They have only been able to run around 18 services a day out of 131. They have even resorted to spending tens of thousands on employing

drivers from an agency.

"We've been out there picketing on the three sites with braziers donated by the firefighters, although they said they want them back soon for their dispute!"

"We get out big numbers especially at the peak times in the mornings and evenings to catch the scab buses. One driver, Ray Horne, was even threatened with a knife by a scab."

"But we know of seven agency workers who said they weren't told we were on strike. They went home after refusing to cross our picket line."

Driver Gary Sayer said, "When that new manager came in he promised us things would get better—the state of the buses, the canteen, working conditions."

"But he hasn't delivered. I'm warmer sitting here than on the buses I drive."

"I was surprised by the ballot result. I had thought that with the whole process taking so long maybe the enthusiasm would diminish. But it hasn't. You know what? I'm getting more militant as I get older!"

Drivers are pushing their union branch to do more around the strike, such as urging supporters to donate to a hardship fund and raising the dispute's profile with a demonstration and rally.

Ellen Nierop, the partner of driver Ray Horne, explained how three drivers joined a group of them last week raising support in the shopping centre. "It was great to see how people were behind the strike," she said.

Turning public sympathy into active solidarity will be vital as the drivers are set to hold a further seven-day strike at the end of January.

HELEN SHOOTER

Defending refugees



Picture: DUNCAN BROWN

PROTESTERS AGAINST the government's brutal new laws on refugees took to the streets of London, Glasgow and Manchester last week.

GLASGOW: More than 60 people attended a protest last Wednesday called by the Glasgow Campaign to Welcome Refugees (see picture).

There were campaign banners and union representatives including Jim Friel, president of the GPMU union.

Socialist MSP Tommy Sheridan accused the Labour government of putting on the clothes of the far right.

John McFadden of the firefighters' FBU union said Blunkett's pandering to far right arguments would only embolden fascists.

MARGARET WOODS

LONDON: "What has happened is the nastiest thing for many years. We won against vouchers for refugees.

"We have got to win against this even more quickly." So said Neil Gerrard MP, addressing demonstrators outside the Home Office last Wednesday.

Up to 70 people braved the snow to join the protest.

They included 15 year old James Haywood, who told demonstrators, "Welcoming refugees is not just humane, they play a huge part in our society."

"Bush and Blair say they want to 'liberate' Iraq yet they are not letting the victims of this 'evil regime' in."

HELEN SHOOTER

MANCHESTER: Over 100 people gathered outside the town hall on Wednesday. Several refugee organisations and representatives of the different ethnic groups in Manchester attended.

We hope to go on from this to build a successful campaign to challenge this new attack on asylum seekers.

SABRINA NUTTER

BRISTOL: Some 300 shoppers in the Broadmead shopping centre put their names to a petition last Saturday condemning the new legislation against asylum seekers.

Alex Gordon, national executive member of the RMT rail union, joined campaigners as we protested, leafleted and petitioned.

JO BENFIELD

NHS

AFTER YEARS of negotiation NHS staff have been offered a package—Agenda for Change—that promises to address past grievances about low pay, gradings and equal pay.

But will it? New Labour is keen to see Agenda for Change accepted by NHS staff.

Doctors recently rejected a parallel national offer.

Ministers are terrified about a similar rejection by the rest of the NHS.

The offer is also tied to a 10 percent pay offer over three years. We were promised that details of the whole package would be available by now, but so far the key detail of what people will get has not come out.

Health Worker, the rank and file paper, is calling a conference to discuss and debate Agenda for Change.

It will be the only forum in which activists from all unions will be able to come together. The conference will involve a number of sessions dedicated to the key questions that the new package raises.

MARK NEW, editor of Health Worker

■ Agenda for Change—Saturday 1 February, 1-4pm, United Services Club, Gough Street, Birmingham. Registration £5. Send to Mark New c/o Unison Offices, Wordsley Hospital, Stourbridge, West Midlands DY8 5QX. E-mail marknew3@aol.com

Homerton

DOMESTIC, portering and catering staff at Homerton University Hospital in Hackney, east London, were to hold consultative ballots this week to begin moves towards a strike.

The 200 workers are employed by private contractor ISS Mediclean. At present staff get as little as £4.45 an hour, have no London weighting, no overtime rate, no company sick pay and no pension.

The Unison union is demanding a pay rise of 10 percent with a minimum of £5.43 an hour and NHS conditions for all.

DIANA SWINGER, Unison branch chair, Homerton University Hospital

Despite this, the union accused Candy and Dave of breaking union instructions and bringing the union into disrepute.

This took place at the time when Unison's leadership was pursuing a vicious and politically motivated witch-hunt against the left in the union.

Dave Prentis, Unison's general secretary, has promised that there will be no more disciplinary cases of this kind.

However, he has not been prepared to intervene to end the attacks against Dave and Candy.

Officers of the London Region of Unison will argue for mitigation at a hearing in the first week of February.

Civil servants

ACTIVISTS IN the PCS civil servants' union are preparing for a key battle in their union.

The union is set to ballot all its members in February about introducing annual national executive elections and conferences. If this is voted through it will massively increase democracy in the union.

Socialist Mark Serwotka won the election for general secretary of the PCS in December 2000.

The PCS national leadership was, and still is, dominated by a right wing faction misnamed "the Moderates".

The Moderates are an undemocratic pro-US, pro-NATO faction who have stifled any attempts by union members to fight back. They, led by outgoing general secretary Barry Reamsbottom, attempted a coup against Serwotka. A hugely successful grassroots rebellion stopped their plans.

The right are terrified that annual elections and conferences will lead to them being kicked out of office.

So, while the NEC are allowing the ballot to take place, they are recommending that

union members reject the proposals.

"This is a very important ballot," Mark Serwotka told *Socialist Worker*.

"These are policy commitments I made when I stood for election. The more the regular leadership is held to account the better."

"For the PCS it's critical. It's a chance to oust the right wing leadership and stop them continuing their moves towards legal action against me."

"If the ballot is won there'll be immediate elections. A failure to win means they will stay in their posts."

"We're all geared up to fight for a national pay campaign. That will be far more likely without a right wing national executive."

"This is a vital chance for members to take control of the union."

"The PCS conference last year overwhelmingly voted in favour of annual conferences and elections," says Steve Cawkwell, PCS vice-president.

"The vote will be seen as a test of what people think of

what the right wing did last summer—they tried to get rid of the elected general secretary.

"We're the people who stood up for democracy and Mark Serwotka—and we're doing it now."

"If we win it's a massive blow to the right wing. If we lose it's a setback for the left."

In an attempt to retain some kind of hold on the union the Moderates have put forward a third question on the ballot.

Right

This will allow the PCS taxation group, traditionally dominated by the right in the union, to have ten seats on the national executive.

"It's a clear political fix," says Steve. "The Inland Revenue has 55,000 members, the Department for Work and Pensions 90,000. Why do they not get reserved seats? People should vote no to this question."

Around the country activists are already preparing to launch a mass campaign around the ballot.

"We can win this campaign easily if we go out to the members," says Sue Bond, a PCS activist in Manchester.

"The Moderates are so discredited. It's obvious why they don't want annual conferences and elections."

"We need a real campaign. That means getting leaflets out arguing why people should vote yes and making sure the issues are discussed in workplaces."

"My branch proposed the motion calling for the PCS to have annual national executive elections," says Paul Murphy, a PCS activist in north London. "I'm glad we're finally getting round to having a ballot on it."

"It's essential. The shenanigans of Barry Reamsbottom and his cronies show why we need more democracy in the union."

"We need a democratic, fighting union that functions effectively in the face of a hostile management."

"Where I work, in the Department of Work and Pensions, management are sacking reps and want to get

rid of 19,000 jobs by 2006.

"In our campaign, as well as having the arguments in our workplaces, we have to go out to less well organised branches and argue with them why they should vote for more democracy. Everything's at stake."

■ For more information and to get involved in the campaign e-mail PCSLeftUnity@tesco.net or go to www.mogtv.com/civilunrest

□ THE LONDON Regional Committee of the Department of Work and Pensions has overwhelmingly voted to ballot all local social security offices and job centres in London for strike action.

This is a significant step forward to defend victimised PCS branch secretary Chris Ford.

Chris is threatened with the sack for his role in supporting members in the recent dispute over safety in the government's Job-Centre Plus.

CIVIL SERVANT

Socialist Worker

Blair declares war on the FBU

THE CASE FOR THE FIREFIGHTERS

FOUR AND a half thousand job losses. Over 150 fire stations to close. Less fire cover at the times people are most likely to be killed by fires. Intolerable working hours and a broken trade union.

That is what the government is demanding firefighters accept after their union has bent over backwards to seek compromise over their pay claim.

The responsibility for renewed strikes by 52,000 firefighters and control room staff lies squarely with New Labour.

It has forced the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) to call fresh strikes, beginning with a 24-hour walkout next Tuesday at 9am.

New Labour's aim is clear—to humiliate a popular group of public sector workers in order to frighten off anyone else from standing up against low pay, privatisation and cuts.

It is demanding firefighters accept these attacks in return for a 4 percent pay increase this year.

There would be a further 7 percent in November, but only for some firefighters deemed to have acquired extra skills.

That's why every single trade unionist and worker should get behind the firefighters. That starts with rejecting the lies of Blair's spin machine.

LIE ONE: The FBU has rejected a negotiated settlement.

DEPUTY PRIME minister John Prescott told FBU leaders last week that his demands for cuts to the fire service (outlined in the inquiry chaired by Sir George Bain) were "non-negotiable".

The employers said at the start of this week that there could be no negotiation over 4,500 job losses and other cuts.

FBU leaders have called off four strikes over the last two months, often against the wishes of many union activists, in order to pursue negotiations.

At each stage the government has demanded more concessions.

It has intervened four times to prevent a settlement between the union and the employers.

John Prescott has made it clear that

by KEVIN OVENDEN

he is willing to push cuts through no matter what the employers and the union decide.

LIE TWO: The firefighters should accept the independent Bain inquiry.

THE BAIN inquiry was not independent.

It accepted government spending limits when it came up with proposals for job losses, worse pensions, reduced fire cover and forcing the public to pay extra, through insurance premiums, for fire cover.

Inquiry member Sir Tony Young told FBU leaders that Bain's report would not be acceptable to them before it had started to take evidence.

The government refused to publish for a whole year the Pathfinder Report into the fire service, which it commissioned. This said there should be an increase in the number of firefighters and in the fire service budget.

LIE THREE: The firefighters are being greedy.

FIREFIGHTERS ARE paid £21,533 a year. They work a 42-hour week.

MPs get £55,118 a year. Cabinet ministers are on £124,979 a year.

The government and the press try to use low pay in other areas as an excuse for poor pay in the fire service.

They say nurses and ambulance workers are worse paid than firefighters.

That's true. But none of those groups will gain if the firefighters lose.

They will be more likely to win significant pay increases if the firefighters are able to break New Labour's unofficial wage curbs.

The government understands this. Tony Blair said at the end of last year that conceding to the firefighters' £30,000 pay claim would "unleash the floodgates" across the public sector.

The money is there to pay for public services and better wages for those who work in them.

New Labour has just increased spending on the military by £2 billion every year (with an open cheque book to cover any additional costs from

attacking Iraq).

Putting the top rate of income tax back where it was under Margaret Thatcher would bring in £19 billion. Restoring the rate of corporation tax on big business to 35 percent would bring in £10 billion every year.

That is more than enough money to increase pay substantially for firefighters, and nurses, health workers, classroom assistants, paramedics and every other group of public sector workers.

LIE FOUR: The firefighters are being led by political dogma into an unnecessary fight with the government.

IT IS New Labour that has picked a fight with the firefighters.

Scandalously it insists that the FBU continues to hand over money to Labour for the privilege of being harangued in the media.

The government has decided to take a hard line with the trade unions while loving up to big business.

It says "modernisation" means opening up public services to profit-grabbing companies.

It wants longer working hours in the name of "family friendly policies".

It wants to cover up for the rundown of the ambulance service by getting firefighters to do the job of paramedics, without the three years necessary training.

It wants job cuts and greater pressure on staff by merging ambulance and fire control rooms.

All of these are political decisions to put the profits of big business above the lives of millions of ordinary people.

FBU members in their overwhelming majority voted to get the Tories out.

They have every right to ask why a Labour government is choosing to treat them as Thatcher did the miners.

The government's assault on the FBU is so extreme that the TUC's John Monks and Brendan Barber, normally loyal to the Labour leadership, are reportedly not on speaking terms with John Prescott.

More is needed.

The TUC and every union leader should stop worrying about how to come up with a rotten compromise and instead start organising action to back the firefighters.



FIREFIGHTERS ARE determined to win their pay claim

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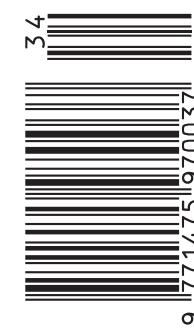
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by CHARLIE KIMBER

Hammer blow for 100 in Scotland

The future for
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"How the hell can any of us have
any influence on that?"

**'Management haven't
behaved as if we're
human beings.'**

Delia Grant

"We got £5.48 an hour at Fullarton, less than £250 a week before tax. It was always hard work."

"It was a hard management and not much money. But it was a life and some cash. I just got through Christmas by scrimping and saving. Now I'm really frightened for the future."

Davey says, "Electronics companies are getting rid of their core workforce and handing out jobs to contractors."

"The contractors use casual labour on a minimum wage—people who get called in for a few hours and then sent home as soon as the pace slackens."

"You read about the docks in the past, with people scrabbling for a job for a day. I sometimes wonder how far we've come."

It was a union meeting last week, but the ISTC union officials did not even have a discussion on the possibility of fighting to save the plant.

"We should march on IBM, show them we're angry, do something to make them think twice about doing the same again," some people had muttered as the meeting began.

But there seemed no opportunity for them to raise the idea of resistance in the meeting.



Pictures: DUNCAN BROWN

FULLARTON'S WORKERS are angry, bitter and anxious

Instead the union official blandly explained management thinking.

"There was a flurry of questions: 'Why should we believe them?' 'How can there be so much money around in the industry and yet we're sent down the road?'" "Is this some sort of punishment for going on strike last year?"

Nobody's convinced. "I've been on four training courses in my life," says 32 year old Ben. "I've been a welder, an electronics technician, a forklift truck driver and an assembler."

"These people offering us training

from the platform tell them to grasp their situation as an 'opportunity', urge them to be 'aspirational' and tell them to be 'demanding'.

"We can fight back. In 1998 we had a campaign and walkouts to win union recognition. We won. Now the union officials don't organise any resistance."

The Fullarton closure has shown again how little companies care for their workers.

It has also shown why we need fighting unions—unions that are prepared to resist job losses and closures, not simply carry management's message to the workforce.

There is a long tradition of resistance across the west of Scotland which needs to be reclaimed—such as the victorious occupation of the UCS shipyards in 1972 to stop them closing.

People employed in Britain work the longest hours in Europe, while millions are unemployed and millions more fear they will join them.

Some workers are angry with the union. "The officials have got their eyes on the Scottish Parliament elections in May," says an ISTC member afterwards. They're worried that if they call a demonstration, let alone a strike, then it will embarrass New Labour.

Chrissie is 19 years old. Her mother was sacked from another local firm, National Semiconductor, four years ago and has not worked since. Chrissie is looking at £300 redundancy. "That's enough to cover me for a fortnight. If I don't get another job I'm in real trouble," she says.

**'I've been more flexible
than a rubber man. It
hasn't got me very far.'**

Ben

may mean well but it's just a bit of sugar on a very nasty pill."

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"I think it would be great to embarrass the government in Edinburgh

Rising profits and misery

SAM RUSSELL'S Simclar International bought Fullarton last August.

As well as Gourock it has other plants in Prestwick, Irvine and Dundee.

These will continue to operate, but many of the workers there are on even worse terms and conditions than the Gourock staff were.

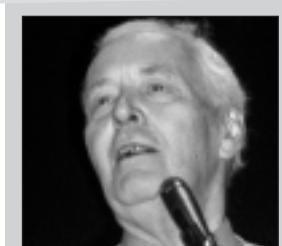
Fullarton's crucial customer was Sanmina, which in turn was a contractor to IBM.

Fullarton bosses say that Sanmina has cut its orders and therefore a plant had to close.

In the same week as the Fullarton plant closed, Sanmina took over IBM's manufacturing operations in the area.

IBM made a worldwide profit of nearly \$8.5 billion last year. Sanmina grabbed \$167 million.

EETS AS OPPOSITION IS SHAKING BLAIR



TONY BENN

'WE ARE seeking to unite the people of the world for peace, democracy and internationalism.'

We are speaking for the whole of humanity.

This is not an argument between black and white or between Arabs and Jews—it is between the people of the world and the rulers of the world.

The US has all the smart weapons, but think what we could do with all the technology and all the money they spend on war to help the poor and the starving.

We are trying to reclaim the earth for the people who produce the wealth.

The prime minister is a very worried man. He cannot take us to war and maintain his own position. Remember Suez.

We are not a protest movement—we are a political movement because we believe another world is possible.

The British prime minister has the power to stop Bush.'

TONY BENN



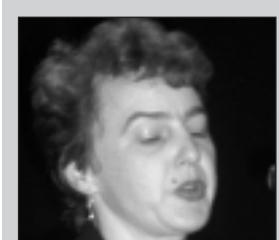
DR SIDDIQUI

'THE 28 September demonstration marked a shift in the Muslim community.'

We are against US hegemony, privatisation and globalisation.

Young people are changing. If you go to the mosques you will find them.'

DR SIDDIQUI, leader of the UK Muslim Parliament



KATE HUDSON

'IT IS our historical responsibility to turn back the tide of this war.'

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament is proud to work alongside the Stop the War Coalition and the Muslim Association to mobilise against this war.'

KATE HUDSON, vice-chair CND

'There is new hope now'

AHMED BEN BELLA was a leader of the Algerian liberation struggle and the first president of independent Algeria in the 1960s. Now he is a key figure in the global anti-war movement, and addressed Saturday's conference:

I AM 86 years old. I spent 24 years in a French prison. But I liberated my country.

I was appointed president of the international movement launched at the Cairo conference in December. Organisations from the South and the North met together to organise common actions to fight against the global system of capital.

The world system must be changed. It has had its time.

There are 400 multinational corporations who control the majority of the world's wealth.

Bush's policies reflect the interests of these corporations. He is attacking Iraq because of these interests—they include oil.



General Motors has four times as much wealth as a country like Egypt with 70 million inhabitants. The 84 richest people in the world have an income greater than that of China.

There is terror in the world. It is that of Mr Bush. There are 35 million people who die of hunger every year.

That is terrorism.

The South—Africa—is totally devastated. We in the South are not responsible

for this. The global system is responsible.

Poverty is endemic in the South and it is spreading to the North. Here, and in France, there is too much poverty.

In the North the movement which is fighting back gives you hope. This movement is very important. I was in Florence—there is hope today, especially among the young.

We live in a dangerous situation. Bush has decided to attack. There are one or two ways in which the war machine can be stopped.

The first is if the American people demonstrate in the streets as they did over Vietnam. They can stop Bush.

There is another way. It lies with people here in Britain. If one or two million say no to war, they can stop Blair.

I have known war. War is a terrible thing.

We must stop Bush and Blair, and it is you who can stop them.'

How can we make the most impact?

DURING THE conference there was a lot of discussion about the most effective way to oppose the war and how to increase the pressure on Blair.

Some argued that the focus should be on groups of people taking more militant action.

But the overwhelming number of delegates felt that mass demonstrations were crucial to involving the widest number of people and giving large numbers of people the confidence to take more action.

Turnout

Chris Bamberg, a delegate from Kensington and Chelsea Stop the War Coalition, argued that there had to be a massive turnout on 15 February.

He argued, "If the demo on 15 February is not bigger than the last one, imagine how Blair will smirk and how Condoleezza Rice, who

had to comment on the last demo, will crow.

"Imagine how the people in Egypt facing repression to oppose war, and how the train drivers in Scotland who refused to move military supplies, will feel.

"15 February will be the launch pad for a mass campaign of civil disobedience involving workers walking out, pensioners blockading roads and students occupying colleges.

"There is no contradiction between demonstrating and direct action.

"During the Vietnam War the movement went from the streets to the workplaces and the ghettos and back to the streets."

Most delegates backed this approach.

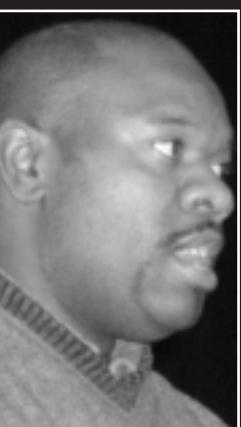
They supported a strategy of organising mass civil disobedience if war breaks out, rather than relying on a few people taking direct action on behalf of the mass movement.

Join the Stop the War Coalition

E-mail office@stopwar.org.uk

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For more info and campaign materials go to www.stopwar.org.uk



'GLOBALLY IT is only the leaders who want this war. The people of the world do not want it.'

We have to be a thorn in the side of this imperialist government.

We in the FBU are also preparing to stand up and fight for what we believe in, to stop the government decimating the fire service.'

CARL ST PAUL, Fire Brigades Union official



'UP UNTIL 1999 I was an officer in the British army. I represent the change in what is happening.'

A friend still in the army told me he was trying to persuade himself that the war was not an entirely squalid affair.

Our argument is penetrating hitherto imperialist bastions of the establishment.'

JAMES THORNE, Manchester University